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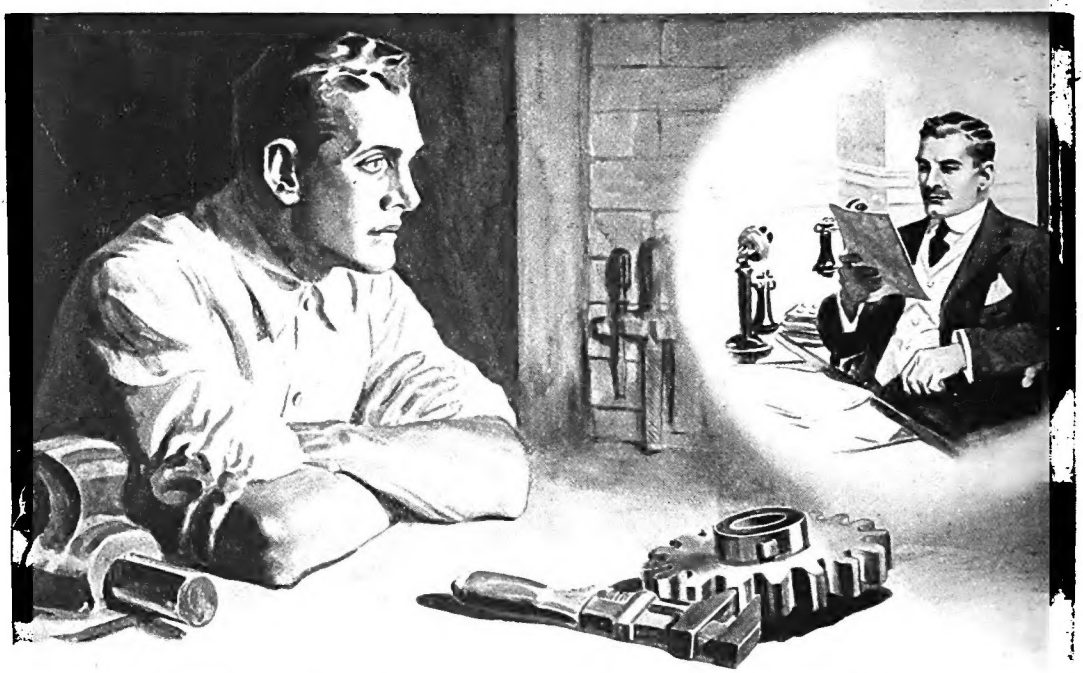

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VOLUME 19
NUMBER 2

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THE MIGHTY MANSLAYER

A Complete Novelette

by H A Lamb

Author of "Dorgan's Devil-Devil," "Alamut," etc.

The Wealth-Bearers are heavily burdened. Their burden is more precious than gold gleaming under enamel. The Wealth-Bearers are strong. Their burden is finer than the seven precious substances.

The faces of the Onon Muren are turned toward the mountains of Khantai Khan. The white faces of the Onon Muren are still. There is fear in the shadows of Khantai Khan. Yet the fear does not touch the Wealth-Bearers.

The five sons of Alan Goa have dried their blood in the earth. But the fear is still in the forests of Khantai Khan. Can another hand lift what One hand held? Nay, the fear is too great!

From the book of Chakar Noyon, the gylong of the Uhoten Lamasery.

CHAKAR NOYON was dead, long before the end of the sixteenth century, when Khlit, the Cossack called the "Wolf," he of the Curved Saber, rode into Samarkand. Yet the book of Chakar Noyon, who was very wise, was owned by Mir Turek, the merchant; and in the bazaars of Samarkand Khlit met with Mir Turek.

Truly, there are many books that are not to be believed. Yet did Mir Turek believe the book of Chakar Noyon, and Mir Turek was not only a shrewd merchant, but a scholar. And he thirsted for gold. Likewise there was the tale of the Leo Tung astrologer. The astrologer did not see the Bearers of Wealth, but he saw the white faces of the Onon Muren and he told of the terror of Khantai Khan.

Khlit could not read, not even the gold inscription on his famous curved sword. He was sick of the hot sands of Persia and the ruined towns of Turkestan. His dress had changed since he became an exile from the Cossack camps—he wore green leather pantaloons, topped by a wide purple sash, with a flowing cloak of crimson silk. He still had his sheepskin hat, and his burned pipe. As he rode through the sun-baked bazaars of Samarkand his eye fell on the booth of Mir Turek, and on the elephant in the booth.

It was a small elephant, or rather a pair of

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them, of ivory and gold. Khlit had never seen such a creature before, and the sight delighted him. He dismounted and sauntered slowly to the bazaar of the merchant, lest the latter suspect that he was anxious to buy.

Mir Turek was a stout man, with a broad nose and slant, bleared eyes. He was dressed in the white robe of a scholar, and he put down a parchment he was reading as the Cossack seated himself cross-legged on the rug before him. Mir Turek watched the stars with the astrologers, and the month was one when his star was ascendent. The ivory elephants, he said, in bastard Usbek which Khlit understood, were not to be sold. They were a talisman of good fortune.

Khlit took from his wallet the last of the gold coins left from the sack of Alamut and laid them on the rug before the merchant. Likewise he drew his sword from its sheath and laid it across his knees. The sun, gleaming on the bright blade with its curious lettering, threw a pallid glow over the yellow face of Mir Turek.

The merchant glanced curiously from the sword to Khlit. His eyes widened as he scanned the inscription on the weapon. Long and steadfastly he looked at its owner. Truly, thought Mir Turek, his star was ascendent.

"Offspring of the devil's jackal!" growled Khlit. "Scouring of a beggar's pot! Where is there a merchant who will not sell his goods? Sell me the images or I will slit your fat belly for you."

Mir Turek turned a shade grayer and his eyes watered. Still, he could not tear his eyes from the inscription. He pointed to the sword.

"Is that, like the gold pieces, from Persia?" he asked.

"Nay, one without honor," replied Khlit carelessly, "a Cossack does not buy or steal his sword. It was my father's and his father's. I will take the images."

"Nay, lord," hastily broke in the merchant, "they are a talisman. I dare not sell." He glanced swiftly to each side down the bazaars. "But come to my house tonight—the house of Mir Turek, the merchant—in the alley at the south corner of the Registan, and we will talk concerning them, you and I."

When Khlit had gone Mir Turek drew together the silk curtains in front of his booth. Yet he did not leave the stall. He sat motionless, in thought. He fingered the parchment as one caresses a treasure. Carefully he read over a portion of the book and drew in his breath with a grateful sigh. Without doubt, his star was watching over him, as the astrologer had said. And the elephants were truly a potent talisman.

In the mind of Mir Turek was a picture. The picture was of a host of fighting men following their banners over the steppe. Also, of the oak trees of Khantai Khan where few men ventured. In the back of Mir Turek's mind, like the reflection in a pool of water, was a fear, an old fear, that had been his father's and his father's before him.

KHLIT was weary of Samarkand and homesick for the wide plains of the steppe. Wherefore he drank much that night, many bowls of Esbek wine, that stirred his memories of the Ukraine and the Tatar land, but did not affect his head or the firmness of his step. He remembered that Mir Turek had invited him to come to his house. So Khlit sought and found the door of the merchant's home on the Registan, and, although he could not read, he came to know somewhat of the book of Chakar Noyon.

The door of Mir Turek opened at his touch and the Cossack swaggered through the antechamber and walked uninvited to a room in the rear. It was a chamber hung with yellow silk of a strange kind, and filled with ivory images of elephants and small pagodas. A girl who had been sleeping curled up on some rugs in one corner sprang to her feet and would have fled swiftly, but Khlit checked her.

She was a child of fourteen, slender and delicate of face with a mass of dark hair that descended over her shoulders. The small, olive face that turned up at the Cossack was frightened. So it was that Khlit met the girl Kerula, child of Mir Turek, whose mother, a Kallmark slave, was dead.

"Eh, little sparrow," chuckled Khlit, patting the girl's hair, "I will not hurt you. Tell your master, Mir Turek, the shrewd merchant, that Khlit, called the Wolf, is come to his house."

He seated himself on the rugs the girl had left. No sooner had he done so than she approached shyly and began to tug at one of his heavy boots.

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"Truly, lord," she said softly, "when a lord is drunk it is hard to take off his high shoes. Yet I would show honor to the one who comes to buy me. Such is the will of my master, Mir Turek, who can cheat better than any other merchant of Samarkand."

"In the house of a stranger, little daughter, they must slay me before my boots can be taken off, or my sword from my side." Khlit threw back his shaggy, white-haired head, with a roar of laughter that startled the girl. "So, I have come to buy you? Nay, devil take it, I have come for some ivory trinkets."

"I did not know, lord," the girl drew back and Khlit saw that she was trembling. "Mir Turek said that he would sell me, and that I should comb my hair, for men would come to look at me and feel my limbs. They have never seen my face in the streets of Samarkand, yet Mir Turek told Fogan Ultai, chief of the servants, that I would bring the price of two good horses. Fogan Ultai doubted, and for that Mir Turek beat me. Then Fogan Ultai struck me on the ears to ease his honor——"

A sound of shuffling steps caused the child to break off in alarm. Mir Turek stood before them, scowling.

"Chatterer! Slanderer of your master! Be off to the slaves' quarters. This is a Cossack lord, not a buyer of slaves, Kerula. Leave us."

The girl slipped from the room, and a smile replaced the scowl on the merchant's face as he seated himself by Khlit. The Cossack considered him in silence. He had never seen a man who resembled Mir Turek. The man's eyes slanted even more than those of a Turkoman; his black hair was straight, instead of curly, and his hands were long and carefully kept. The merchant proffered a cup of wine from an ebony stand, but Khlit shook his head.

"The Turkomans say," said Khlit grimly, "that when a sword is drawn, no excuse is needed. I have come for the trinkets, not wine."

"Yet I am no Turkoman," smiled Mir Turek, and his voice purred. "See, it is written that he who drinks from the cup need have no care. Can you read the words on the cup? The language is like that on your sword."

"Nay, it looks as if a dog had scratched it," responded the Cossack idly.

He could not read in books, but he was wise in the language of men's faces and he knew that Mir Turek had more in his mind than he spoke.

"Here is the money, I will take the trinkets."

He nodded at where the elephants stood on an ebony cabinet, but Mir Turek held up one hand.

"The men of Samarkand are fools—Usbeks—and are fit only to be slaves. The chief of my slaves, Fogan Ultai, has told me that there is a story in the bazaars that you are Khlit, the Cossack who outwitted Tal Taulai Khan, leader of the Golden Horde, and that your sword is as much to be feared as that of Kaidu, the warrior of the Tatars. Truly, I see that you are a man of valor. I have need of such a man."

"Aye, I am Khlit. Men call me the Wolf. Say what is on your mind, Mir Turek. The short word is best, if it is the truth."

Mir Turek's eyes half-closed. Through the narrowed lids they rested on Khlit's sword.

"Before the star Ortu descends from its zenith," he said slowly, "I am going from Samarkand to Karakorum, in the land of the Tatars far to the north. The journey will be over the mountains that these fools call the Roof of the World, past Kashgar, to the Great Desert of Gobi. There is no one in Samarkand who will go with me, yet the journey is not difficult, for my grandfather's father came over the route from Karakorum to Samarkand."

"Aye," said Khlit.

"I need a man who will lead the Turkomans who go with me as guard," pursued the other. "There are robbers in the Roof of the World and by the borders of the Great Desert the Tatar tribes fight among themselves, for Tal Taulai Khan is dead and the Jun-gar fight with the Kallmarks and the Boron-gar with both.

"The home of my family is in Altur Haiten, by the mountains of Khantai Khan. But the journey to the north is perilous, and I need a leader of fighting men. I am learned in the knowledge of books and trade, but I can not wield a sword. The name of Khlit, the Wolf, will protect my caravan."

"Aye," said Khlit. Something in his tone caused Mir Turek to glance at him sharply.

"Will you come to Karakorum, lord?" he asked. "Name what price you ask. It

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will be paid. As a pledge, take, without payment the twin elephants."

"I will come," said Khlit, "when your tongue has learned to speak the truth, Mir Turek. Truly, I am not a fool, like these of Samarkand. An Usbek chief could lead your men, and for little pay. My name is not known north of the Roof of the World. Cease these lies, Mir Turek—I like them little."

The slant eyes of the merchant closed, and he folded his arms into his long sleeves. He was silent for a space as if listening, and as he listened a change came over his face. Khlit heard the sound, too, a low murmur in an adjoining room. Mir Turek got to his feet without noise and vanished in the direction of the sound. Khlit waited watchfully, but in a moment the merchant reappeared, dragging Kerula by the arm. The girl's brown eyes were filled with tears.

"Busybody! One without honor!" he flung the slender form of the slave girl on the rugs, and planted his slippered toes in her ribs. "Blessed is the day when I can sell you and be bothered no longer by tears. Did I not say the lord was not a buyer of women? Fogan Ultai shall reward you for listening."

The girl sobbed quietly, rolling over to escape the assault of Mir Turek's broad feet. Khlit watched in silence. She was the merchant's property, and he was entitled to do with her as he chose. Still, the sight was not pleasant. Mir Turek continued his imprecations, mingled with promises that Kerula would be sold without fail, on the morrow. Khlit touched the girl's hair as if admiring its fine texture.

"Harken, Kerula," he said. "Is there no young Turkoman who looks upon you with favor and who would please you for a master?"

"Nay, lord," sobbed the girl, withdrawing beyond the merchant's reach, "why should I like a Turkoman? Without doubt, they are shaggy as mountain sheep."

"She can not come to Karakorum," put in Mir Turek. "The journey through the mountains is too hard, and she would die, without profit to me."

Khlit regarded his black pipe thoughtfully. It was long since he had seen the fresh face and clear eyes of a child. He reached into his wallet and drew out the coins he had offered for the elephants. These he laid before Mir Turek.

"You have named a price for the girl, Mir Turek," he said, "the price of two horses. Here it is. I will buy the child."

The merchant's slant eyes gleamed at sight of the gold, but he shook his head dubiously.

"I could get a better price in the bazaars. What do you want with the girl, Cossack? She can not come on the journey."

Khlit's beard wrinkled in a snarl.

"Take the money for the girl, Mir Turek. I will take Kerula. Nay, she will not come with us, one-without-understanding!" Turning to the slave, Khlit's tone softened. "Tomorrow, Kerula, you can beat the back of Fogan Ultai with a stick, for I will watch. Go where you will in Samarkand, for you are free. I have bought you of Mir Turek. And I say to go where you will."

The girl gazed at him wide-eyed. As if to convince herself she had heard aright she put out her hand and touched the Cossack's coat. The latter, however, took no more notice of her.

II

KHLIT had said that Mir Turek lied. It was then that the merchant told Khlit the true cause of his journey to Karakorum. And this tale was strange, strange beyond belief. It was the fruit of Mir Turek's reading, and the tale of the Leo Tung astrologer who had gone, with Mir Turek's grandfather's father, to the mountains of Khantai Khan, to the tomb of Genghis Khan.

Yet in spite of the strangeness of the tale, Khlit did not say this time that Mir Turek lied. In Khlit's veins was the blood of the Cossack Tatar folk who had ruled the empire of the steppe, and taken treasure from their enemies. He wondered, but did not speak his thoughts.

It was a tale that began with the death of Genghis Khan, called the "Master of the Earth," and ended with the death of Mir Turek's ancestor and the Leo Tung man from the vapor that lay among the trees of Khantai Khan. It was about a treasure such as Khlit had not thought existed in the world, the treasure of Genghis Khan.

There came a time, said Mir Turek, when the "Mighty Manslayer" paused in his conquest of the world. The beast Kotwan appeared to Genghis Khan in a vision and the ruler of the Tatar horde which had

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subjugated the world from Khorassan to Zipangu, and from Lake Baikal to the furthest city of Persia, returned home to die.

Genghis Khan was wiser than all other rulers. Knowing that he was dying, he gave orders that peace be made with his worthiest foes, the Chinese of Tangut and Sung, and that his death should not be disclosed. When his body was carried to the tomb in the mountains of Khantai, twenty thousand persons were slain to keep him company to the shades of the Teneri, among them those who built the tomb. So said the astrologer of Leo Tung.. Thus none could say they had seen the spot where the Master of the Earth lay in the grip of the Angel of Death.

Twenty thousand souls accompanied Genghis Khan on his journey to the Teneri, and the treasure, spoils of a thousand cities, was placed in his tomb. This tomb was unmolested by the Tatars, until the coming of Leo Tung, who was a Chinaman and dared to look on the dead face of the leader of the Horde. Leo Tung had found the spot in the forests of Khantai Khan, with Mir Turek's ancestor. They had passed the gate of the Kukukon River; they had passed the Onon Muren; they had seen the starlight gleam on the Bearers of Wealth.

They had seen the treasure of Genghis Khan, said Mir Turek, his eyes gleaming as with fever, but the mists of Khantai Khan had closed around them. Mir Turek did not know just why they had left the tomb. He knew that a great fear came on them and they fled. The Leo Tung man had died very quickly, and the other went from the Khantai Khan region to Samarkand.

Before he died he had told his son the way to the tomb of Genghis Khan. And so the tale had come to Mir Turek. The merchant of Samarkand knew that a change had taken place in the Tatar people. Their power had been broken by the Chinese, shortly after the death of Genghis Khan. With the assistance of Khlit, he might enter the tomb and find the treasure of Genghis Khan, Master of the Earth and leader of the Golden Horde.

Aye, said Mir Turek softly, he was a scholar, but he had searched in books for the wealth of Genghis Khan. There was the tale of Chakar Noyon, *gylong*, which told of the tomb. Chakar Noyon, being a priest, had said that the Onon Muren or spirits of the slain twenty thousand guarded the tomb; that was an idle story. Mir Turek did not believe it.

Nevertheless, when the other had finished, Khlit asked himself why the fathers of Mir Turek had not sought for the tomb of Genghis Khan. He found the answer in the fever that burned in the other's eyes and the restless movements of the white hands. Mir Turek felt in his heart a great fear of what he was to do, and this fear had been his fathers'.

Khlit was not the man to shrink from seizing gold. Even the gold of the tomb of Genghis Khan. Yet, with his desire for gold was mingled delight at the thought of returning to the steppe that had been his home, even in another part of the world.

III

THUS it happened that Khlit began the journey which was to take him over the mountains called the Roof of the World, above Ladak, or Tibet, north of Kashgar, past Issyuk Kul and Son Kul, the twin lakes of the clouds to the desert of Gobi.

Concerning this journey and its ending there are few who believe the story of Khlit. Yet the Cossack was not the man to say what was not so, for love of the telling. And there is the book of Chakar Noyon, to be found in one of the Samarkand mosques, and the annals of the chronicler of Hangi-Hi, the great general of the Son of Heaven. Truly, belief is, after all, the fancy of the hearer and only the fool is proud of his ignorance.

When the sun gilded the top of the ruins of Bibi Khanum, the followers of Mir Turek had pitched their felt tents on the slope of Chupan Ata, on the way to the Syr River. Already the heat of the Samarkand valley had been replaced by the cool winds of the mountains and Khlit was glad to don his old sheepskin coat. He looked around with some satisfaction at the camp.

Mir Turek's following consisted of a dozen Turkomans and Fogan Ultai, master of the slaves. These had placed their small tents in a circle beside the donkeys, the pack-animals of the expedition.

Khlit's leadership had already instilled discipline into the sturdy but independent followers. Two stood as sentries near the caravan path. The Turkomans had tried rebellion against the Cossack, and had

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learned why he was called the Wolf. Fogan Ultai, however, as the servant of Mir Turek, was not under Khlit's orders. Twice during the day the leader of the slaves had refused obedience and Mir Turek had upheld him.

Fogan Ultai was a small man, pale in face, with dark hair like his master's, and the same slant eyes. Khlit did not like the man, who was watchful and silent, speaking occasionally to Mir Turek in a tongue the Cossack did not understand. As long as Fogan Ultai did not interfere with his authority over the Turkomans, Khlit was willing to leave the other in peace.

IT WAS after the evening meal, and Khlit was smoking his pipe in front of the tent he had pitched for himself. He sat with his back to the tent, his sword over his knees, watchful of what went on. In the twilight gloom he could make out the figures of the men throwing dice by a fire.

Suddenly Khlit took his pipe from his mouth. He made no other movement, but his tall figure stiffened to alertness and his keen eyes searched the gloom. A shadow had appeared, slipping from tent to tent, making no sound. And the sentries had not given warning.

The shadow paused in front of him, and Khlit's hand went to his sword. The form approached him, and a small figure cast itself at his feet. A pair of white hands clasped his boots.

"Lord, you are my master—be merciful," the voice of Kerula came out of the darkness. "Lord, do not kick me, because I followed after you on a donkey that was lame, so it was not taken with the others, and slipped past the men who are watching. I followed because you would have sent me back if I had come sooner. But my hunger is very great now, and I am cold."

Khlit reached out his rough hand and took the girl by the shoulder. Kerula's white face looked up into his. He could feel the girl's warm breath against his cheek.

"I said you could not come, Kerula," he replied gruffly. "Why do you seek the hardship of the journey? It is no path for a girl. There are gallants in Samarkand who would buy you flowers and slaves——"

"Nay, lord. I am afraid of the men of Samarkand. I have no master but you, Khlit, lord. The others would bring shame on me, the women say. I will follow after the caravan, truly, on the lame donkey, and you will not know I am there. Perhaps I can prepare your food, or clean the mud from your boots. Do not let them send me to Samarkand."

Khlit shook his head, and the child gave a soft wail of distress.

"The way is too hard," he said. "The men will give you food, but tomorrow ——"

The girl rose from her knees, with bowed head.

"You are my lord, and you send me to the bazaars of Samarkand. I have no home. If you would let me follow, I would sleep with your horse, and bring your wine cups, until we reach the land where Genghis Khan rules. My mother, before she died, told me of the land."

Khlit raised his head in surprise at the girl's speech. Before he could answer a shadow appeared beside Kerula, and Fogan Ultai's soft voice spoke.

"Get back where you came from, Kerula, or your palms will be well whipped! You have heard the word of the Cossack lord. Our master, Mir Turek, would let you off less easily if he knew you were here."

The master of the slaves caught the child roughly and shook her. She clasped his hand and sank her teeth into it viciously. Fogan Ultai gave a cry of pain. As he lifted his free hand to strike the girl she sprang free defiantly.

"Mir Turek shall know of this, offspring of the low-born," hissed the servant. "You say you have had no food for a day. Good! You will pray to me for food before you shall leave the camp."

"Who gave you authority, Fogan Ultai," said Khlit, "to give orders in the camp? If I say the child shall eat, you will bring her food."

"I?" Fogan Ultai shivered as if with cold. "I am no slave, and my caste——" he broke off—"nay, I heard you say she was to go, Khlit."

"I said that the men would give her food. You have keen ears, Fogan Ultai. Since you have come, like a dog at the scent of a carcass, you may bring the food to Kerula. She is hungry."

"Mir Turek would not allow that to come to pass, Khlit," the other's voice was smooth and sibilant. "He knows it is not

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for such as I to bring food, or for a Cossack to give me orders——"

Fogan Ultai's speech ended in a strangling gasp. Khlit had risen from his sitting posture, and as he rose his heavy fist crashed into the other's face. Fogan Ultai lay on the ground, his arms moving slowly, half-stunned. Slowly he got to his feet, staggering. The girl drew in her breath sharply and shrank back.

"Cossack," Fogan Ultai mumbled, for blood was in his mouth, "the girl is yours and if it is your wish—she shall eat. But a man is a fool who seeks an enemy. Let another bring the food."

"I said you, Fogan Ultai, not another."

The attendant was silent for a moment. He felt his injured face tenderly. Khlit waited for the flash of a dagger or the hiss of an imprecation but Fogan Ultai was silent. Surely, Khlit thought, he was a strange man.

"The food shall be brought, Cossack, if it is still your wish. Yet it would be well to say otherwise."

Receiving no response from Khlit, the man turned and disappeared into the darkness. Khlit turned to the girl roughly, for he knew that he had earned an enemy.

"Sit in my tent, Kerula," he said shortly. "The wind is cold. After you have eaten, roll yourself in my woolen robe. I shall sleep with my horse."

The next day saw Kerula mounted on her lame donkey riding behind Khlit and Mir Turek. The latter said nothing concerning the appearance of the girl, and Khlit thought that he had spoken with Fogan Ultai. The difficulty of the way grew, and cold gripped the riders. The Turkoman horses, wrapped in their felt layers, with their high-peaked wooden saddles seemed indifferent to the change in climate, but the donkeys shivered, and Mir Turek wrapped himself in a costly fur robe. Khlit saw to it that the girl had a sheepskin cloak that had been carried in the baggage.

The moon which had been bright at the start of the journey had vanished to a circlet of silver when the riders, under guidance of one of the Turkomans, passed the blue waters of the mountain lakes, Issyuk Kul and Son Kul, and reached the passes of the Thian Shan Hills. Here the Turkoman guide gave up the leadership, but Fogan Ultai declared that he could find his way among the passes with the aid of the merchantman's maps and the stars.

Khlit, who saw everything as he rode, noted that Mir Turek had fallen silent, and that the merchant spent much time in talk with Fogan Ultai in the *yurtas* in the evenings. So far, however, the master of the slaves had been content to keep out of Khlit's way. The Cossack paid no further attention to Fogan Ultai, other than to see to the loading and priming of the brace of Turkish pistols he carried in his belt. These were the only firearms of the expedition.

Mir Turek broke his silence, one day when the sunlight lay on the rock slopes of the mountains without warming the faces of the riders, to speak of Genghis Khan. It was through these passes, said the merchant, that the slaves of the Mighty Manslayer carried the wealth that had been taken from the cities of Damascus and Herat to Karakorum.

The fever burned in the man's eyes as he spoke. The wealth of Genghis Khan had been so great that his minister had never counted it. From the four corners of Asia slaves brought it to the Master of the Earth. Genghis Khan had kept a hoard of gold, the book of Chakar Noyon said, at his palace. One minister had given away jewels to his wives, until Genghis Khan had learned of it, when the minister had cut his own throat to avoid the wrath of the conqueror.

Khlit listened while Mir Turek told of the campaigns of Genghis Khan, and how victories had come to the standard of the Horde, the standard of yaks' tails that had traveled from Karakorum to Herat.

The merchant halted his words as the advance rider of the party came to them. The Turkoman, who had been some hundred paces in front of Khlit and Mir Turek, brought with him a slender man, in a long robe who carried a pack. The man, Khlit saw, was clean-shaven, with the hair of his forehead cut to the skin.

The stranger spoke with Mir Turek, who shook his head to show that he did not understand. At the merchant's gesture Fogan Ultai rode up and addressed the newcomer. The two fell back among the attendants where Kerula was. But Mir Turek did not resume his conversation. He seemed impatient to halt, when before he had been eager to push on. As his reason, he gave the rising wind which seemed to promise snow. The star Ortu, said Mir Turek,

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was no longer above them, and they could not count on its protection.

Khlit accordingly called a halt. The felt tents were pitched, the *yurta* formed. Kerula was accustomed to see to the erecting of the Cossack's shelter, which was beside her own, and Khlit rode into the twilight to see to the posting of the sentries. Before he returned he saw a strange sight. For the Turkomans on watch had kneeled to the ground and laid their ears against the path.

Khlit brought the men to their feet with a hearty imprecation. The Turkomans were sullen, saying that they listened for signs of approaching danger. What this danger was, they would not say. But one, the less sullen of the two, muttered that danger might be met along the path that could be heard, and could not be seen.

Impatient of the men's superstition, Khlit returned to his tent where Kerula sat with his evening meal. Around the fire which blazed very brightly, the others of the party were gathered. And Khlit frowned as he watched. The stranger they had met that day stood in front of the fire, throwing grease from a pot upon it.

As the man with the shaven head did this, he read aloud from a small book he held. The words meant nothing to Khlit, but Mir Turek and Fogan Ultai listened intently. Truly, Khlit thought, Mir Turek was a man of double meanings. For the merchant had declared that the newcomer was a beggar. Khlit had never known a beggar who could read. As he turned this over in his mind, Kerula, who had crept near him spoke.

"Khlit, lord," she whispered, her eyes bright in the firelight, and all save her eyes covered by the fur cloak for the cold, "last night I dreamed a strange dream. It was that a falcon flew down on my wrist, and it held the sun and a star in its talons. The falcon had flown far, and was weary, but it held the sun. And I was glad."

"You have many dreams, little sparrow," smiled Khlit.

When he smiled, the bitterness faded from his hard face. Kerula loved to see him smile. More often of late she had coaxed him to do so.

"Am I a conjuror, to tell you what they mean?"

"Nay, Khlit, lord," she chattered, "you are too tall and big for a conjuror. See, the man who is reading prayers by the fire is such a one. I heard Fogan Ultai say he was a *gylong*, servant of the great lamas, and a man of wisdom."

Fogan Ultai had called the stranger a man of wisdom. Mir Turek had said he was a beggar. One had lied, and Khlit suspected it was Mir Turek.

"Did Fogan Ultai say more than that, Kerula?" he asked carelessly, watching the group by the fire.

"Aye, Khlit, lord. I heard him say to Mir Turek the man was a conjuror. Then he said to the man with the long robe that he was clever, he could conjure the two pistols away from you, and he—Fogan Ultai—would give him a donkey and some gold."

"Hey, little Kerula, he would have to be a very wise man to do that," chuckled Khlit. "Are you sure you did not dream that, too?"

"Nay, Khlit, lord," the girl looked at him strangely, "but I dreamed that we met an evil, two-headed snake, and that you buried it. After that, the snake was no longer evil."

Khlit said no more, but long after Kerula had crept into her tent, and the group around the fire had scattered, he sat in thought, his curved sword across his knees. What had prompted the Turkomans to turn sullen and lay their ears to the ground? Why had Mir Turek, who trusted him, lied that evening about the *gylong*? And why did Fogan Ultai desire his pistols?

IV

In a dream the beast Kotwan with the head of a horse and a horn in its forehead, that speaks all languages, came to Genghis Khan, the Mighty Manslayer. The beast Kotwan spoke as follows: "It is time for the Master to return to his own land." Whereupon Genghis Khan turned homeward. And when he reached his home he died.

From the book of Chakar Noyon, gylong.

CONCERNING the events that came to pass when the party of Mir Turek crossed the desert of Gobi, Khlit is the only one who will tell. It is true that the narrative of the Hangi Hi chronicler mentions the sights and sounds which Khlit and Kerula heard in the night. But the Chinese historian ascribes the sounds to wind in the sand and the imagination of the Tatar travelers whose minds were filled with stories of Genghis Khan. Fools, said the Chinaman, walk unreflecting. Yet Khlit was not the man to be

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led astray by sounds that he imagined.

As for Kerula, Khlit found that the girl's tongue was eager to repeat stories of Genghis Khan that she heard from Mir Turek. The child had listened while the scholar read from his books. The books were all she knew, and so she supposed that Genghis Khan and his Tatar Horde were still alive, and might be met with on the sands of the Great Desert.

Khlit humored her in her fancies, and smiled at the dreams she repeated. He knew that the "dreams" of Kerula were her way of telling things that she thought he might not believe. The Cossack did not laugh at the girl for her fancies, because he was always ready to hear more of Genghis Khan, a conqueror more powerful than any Khlit had known. Even Tal Taulai Khan seemed a *mirza* beside the figure of the man who was called the Mighty Manslayer.

Mir Turek had ceased to talk with Khlit concerning their journey, and the tomb in the forest of Khantai Khan. The merchant and Fogan Ultai rode with the *gylong*. Neither interfered with his leadership, which was all Khlit asked. He was aware that since the coming of the *gylong*, a change had taken place in the party. The Turkomans became more sullen and had to be driven forward. And Mir Turek grew silent, seemingly waiting for something. Khlit took care to keep Kerula with him as much as possible. He had heard the Turkomans talking about her.

"Fogan Ultai says," he had heard them say, "that the girl Kerula has the ears of a skunk and the eyes of an ermine."

When the party descended the slope of the Thian Shan Hills and entered the desert, the Turkomans murmured further. This was natural, however, in face of the difficulties in front of them.

The desert, the first that Khlit had seen, was an ocean of sand, with wind ridges and gullies. In order to keep to a straight course by the sun, it was necessary to cut across the ridges, which varied from eight to some twenty feet in height. There were few springs to be met with, and the party was forced to keep an outlook for the coming of wind, which meant a halt and hurried preparation against sand-storms.

Although the country was new to Khlit, he did not give up his leadership of the party. On the advice of the *gylong*, Khlit exchanged their donkeys at a village on the edge of the desert, for a smaller number of camels. He kept his own horse, but the others gave up theirs. Thus the *gylong* gained a camel for his donkey.

After a rest at the village, Khlit ordered an advance into the desert, when the moon was again full. Mir Turek was content, as the star he regarded as his protection was now high in the heavens. Khlit rode at the rear of the little caravan where he could watch the Turkomans and where there was no one at his back.

The party had gone far into the desert and the Thian Shan summits had vanished on the horizon when the first of the strange events came to pass.

Khlit had been sleeping soundly in his felt tent, when he was awakened by Kerula crawling through the flap in early daylight. The girl's hair hung loose around her face, and Khlit saw that her eyes were wide and fixed. He had grasped his sword when the flaps of the tent moved, but now he released it, and sat up, wide awake on the instant. The girl crept close to him, shivering, yet it was not from cold of the night.

"I am frightened, Khlit, lord," she whispered. "For I have had a dream in the night. It was that an animal crawled around my tent, crying my name. I heard it sniffing, and clawing at the tent. How could an animal call my name? I am afraid."

"A dream will not hurt you, little sparrow," answered Khlit cheerfully. "And the sun has come up to chase it away."

The girl however, did not smile.

"When I came from my tent," she said softly, "I saw the marks of the beast. It had gone away. But how could it speak? I heard it calling, calling 'Kerula.' Animals can not speak, can they, unless——"

Khlit, to distract her, bade her gruffly prepare his morning meal. Later, however, when he left his shelter he took care to look at the ground around Kerula's tent which was beside his. He saw that there were actually marks on the ground.

Carefully, Khlit scanned them. They were marks of hoofs, and ran completely around the tent, clearly visible in the sand. When he tried to follow them away from the place he lost them in the tracks of the party. The hoof-marks, he saw, were smaller than those of a horse. He had heard that there were antelopes in the

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desert. Yet the tracks were larger than antelope hoofs. He said nothing of what he had seen to the girl.

The day's journey was short, and Mir Turek halted early, fearing a sand-storm, for the sun had gone behind clouds. The Turkomans gathered about the fire at dusk, and Khlit was obliged to drive one from the *yurta* to watch from a sand ridge. For his own satisfaction he placed a pointed stake firmly in the ground by his tent, indicating the direction they were to take in the morning. He had learned by experience that the ridges were often changed in appearance overnight.

As he sat over his evening meal with Kerula pensive beside him, the figure of Fogan Ultai detached itself from the group by the fire and approached him.

"Health to you, Khlit," said the master of the slaves with a bow. "The Turkomans have asked that I come as spokesman. It is not well to force a man to do what his habits forbid. They are murmuring against standing sentry during the night. The Turkomans have heard stories of the desert in the village we left. They think evil things may come to the sentries. You and I are wise—we know they are fools. Still, it is best to let a man do as he is accustomed."

"Does a sheep hide his head when the tiger hunts, Fogan Ultai?" said Khlit. "Shall the camp be blind during the night when there may be danger? Nay, a beast came last night and passed around Kerula's shelter."

Fogan Ultai shook his head, smiling.

"There are no beasts in the desert, Khlit. The evils the Turkomans fear are not to be seen. Let them sleep in their tents. It is not well," the man's voice dropped, "to tie the knot of hatred."

"Then, Fogan Ultai, you and I are wise. We do not fear the stories of evil. We two will watch, each taking half the night."

For a long moment Fogan Ultai's slant eyes gleamed into Khlit's. Then he turned away indifferently.

"Let the Turkomans stand watch. They are low-born."

Yet the Turkomans could not have watched well that night. Before dawn Kerula burst into Khlit's shelter and clung to him sobbing. The same animal, she said, had come close to her tent. She had not been asleep this time, and she had heard its claws on the felt. Its breath had smelled of musk, so strong that it sickened her.

When the beast had been on the other side of the tent, the girl had slipped out on the side nearest Khlit and had dashed into his shelter. She was shaken with sobs, pressing her hands against her face.

"It is the beast, Kotwan," she sobbed. "He has come to take me with him. Oh, do not let him take me, Khlit, lord. I am afraid of Kotwan, who smells of musk. He called my name and he wants me to follow him to the shades of the Teneri, up into the air over the desert."

Khlit tried to quiet the girl, saying that he heard nothing, but when he made a move to leave the shelter, she clung to him tearfully. It was long before she dropped off to sleep, wrapped in some of his furs. Khlit listened, without moving for fear of disturbing her, and heard nothing more. Yet he fancied that an odor of musk filled the shelter.

V

THE next day the girl had recovered somewhat from her fright. She refused to leave Khlit's side during the march over the shifting sands. Sleep overtook her at times on the camel, and she swayed in the cords that kept her in place. Each time this happened, she awoke with a start, and cried out for Khlit.

The Cossack did not like the look in the girl's face. She was pale and the lack of sleep added to the fatigue of the journey was beginning to tell on her. Khlit did not mention her experience of the night, for he found that she believed the strange beast Kotwan had come to her tent. The girl's brain was filled with idle fancies. His heart was heavy, however, at the look of dread in her eyes, for Kerula had endeared herself to him, as much as another person could win the affection of a man who counted his enemies by the thousand, and thirsted for fighting.

That night Kerula begged to be allowed to sleep in his tent, but the Cossack sternly ordered her to her own, and she went reluctantly. Contrary to his custom, he did not post a sentry, but retired early to his shelter, and his snores soon kept accompaniment to the monotonous reading of the *gylong* by the fire.

Before midnight, however, when the camp

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was quiet, Khlit's snores ceased. The flap of his tent was lifted cautiously and the Cossack crawled out on all fours. Noiselessly he made his way from his tent to the edge of the camp.

The *yurta* had been placed in a gully. Khlit, surveying his surroundings in the starlight, saw that the camels and the Turkoman shelters were some paces distant from the tents of the leaders.

Crawling down the gully, Khlit sought a depression where he could see the tent of Kerula against the skyline, within bowshot. He scooped out a seat for himself in the sand, with his back against the wind. Drawing his sheepskin *svitza* close about him, for the night was cold, he settled himself to watch, denying himself the comfort of a pipe. If an animal visited the tents between then and dawn, he was determined to have a look at it.

Khlit did not attach significance to the fears of the girl about the mythical animal she called Kotwan. He had seen, however, the tracks around the tent which were too large for an antelope, and he had caught the scent of musk, which Kerula declared came from the visitant of the night. No animal that Khlit knew smelled of musk, and had sharp hoofs. As far as he knew Fogan Ultai was right when he said there were no beasts in the desert, for the party had not met any since leaving the foothills of the Thian Shan. Wherefore Khlit was curious.

The Cossack was accustomed to watching, and he did not nod as he sat in the sand depression, with his scrutiny fixed on the horizon near the tents. The stars gleamed at him, and an occasional puff of wind stirred the sand about him. He must have watched for some hours, and the stars were not paler when he sat erect, gazing closely at the tents.

Something had moved near Kerula's shelter. The light was indistinct and Khlit could not make it out. He had heard nothing. Presently he felt that the thing was moving away from the tent and nearer him.

Khlit softly removed one of the pistols from his belt and got to his knees. Crouching low over the sand he could make out a dark object passing across the stars moving down the gully toward him. For the first time he heard a sound, a low hiss that he could not place.

Then Khlit stiffened alertly. The wind had brought him the odor of musk. The scent clung to his nostrils and ascended to his brain. He felt the hair at the back of his neck stir, and a chill puff of wind sent tingles down his spine.

The black object was within a few paces, and he saw that it was something moving on all fours. Carefully he leveled the pistol, taking the best aim he could in the dark.

And then Khlit let the pistol fall to his side. The odor of musk that came to him so strongly was surely from the windward side. Yet the dark object came toward him from the *yurta* which was away from the wind. Khlit drew a deep breath and his eyes strained toward the moving form. His heart gave a leap as he recognized it. It was Kerula, moving over the sand on her hands and knees.

The child had crept from her tent out into the night that she feared. He could hear her labored breathing as she passed him slowly. The scent of musk could not have come from the girl. It had come from the windward side. Khlit turned quickly and searched the darkness with anxious glance.

On the further side of the gully, some distance in front of the girl was a larger object, defined against the sand. It moved in the same direction, away from the camp. Khlit heard a hissing sound come from it, and understood why he had smelled the musk. Watching the girl, he had not seen the other thing pass him. He made it out as an animal of powerful build, with horns, that seemed to drag its hind legs.

Quickly Khlit raised his pistol. Sighting it at the beast's head he pulled the trigger. The weapon clicked dully and he thrust it into his belt with a curse. The sand must have choked its flint and powder.

With a hasty glance at the moving forms, Khlit rose to his feet. Bending low, he trotted over the sand ridge at his side into the gully that ran beside the one he had been in. For some distance he ran, following the winding of the gully.

Fearful of losing trace of the girl and the animal, he turned back to the ridge, to find that he was running through an opening into the other gully. His heavy boots made no sound in the sand, and Khlit did not see that he was heading straight for the creeping animal until he heard a sharp hiss, and saw the object rise up before him.

He caught a brief glimpse of horns and long ears outlined against the sky, and felt a

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hot breath on his face. His hand leaped to his sword, and the curved blade was pulled from its sheath.

As Khlit's arm swept upward with the sword, it moved outward. The blade struck the beast where it was aimed, under the head. Khlit saw it stagger back and slashed it twice across the head as it fell to the sand. Moving back from the struggling object he called to the girl.

"Kerula! Here is Khlit, do not be afraid."

A moment more and Kerula was beside him, clinging to his coat, her head buried in his sleeve.

"It was the beast Kotwan," she cried, "calling me outside my tent. I heard it calling me and I came. Oh, it smelled of musk, and it kept calling. My legs would not hold me up and I crawled—where is the beast Kotwan?"

"Nay, little Kerula," laughed Khlit, "the beast Kotwan is a strange beast. But it will not come for you again. See!"

Drawing the girl after him, the Cossack stepped to the side of the dark object on the sand. He felt of it cautiously. It did not move. And when Khlit drew up his hand it held a beast's hide and horns. The hide seemed to be that of an antelope. The girl had bent over the figure that lay at their feet, fearfully. She tugged at Khlit's arm excitedly.

"Khlit, lord," she whispered, "it is the *gylong*. You have slain the *gylong*."

"Aye," said Khlit shortly. "The conjuror will conjure no more. I thought it was a strange animal that stood up on two legs when it saw you."

He felt in the sand and lifted two objects. One was a pony's hoof, cut off above the fetlock and dried. The other was a long dagger. He showed them to the girl.

"There is Kotwan's hoof, little Kerula. And the hide stinks of musk."

Khlit said nothing to Kerula, but he remembered the words of Fogan Ultai, and he guessed it was not wantonness, but the promise of a reward that had led the conjuror to terrify the girl and lure her into the desert. Also he began to understand why Fogan Ultai had coveted his pistols. Yet much was not clear to Khlit. He knew that Fogan Ultai hated Kerula because Khlit had made him demean himself in bringing her food. Still, this did not seem a sufficient reason for the girl's death.

KHLIT'S détour into the other gullies had confused him as to the direction of the camp. Unwilling to run the risk of going further from the *yurta* in trying to find it, he took the girl a short distance from the dead man and sat down to wait for dawn, sheltering her with his *svitza*. Kerula, relieved of her fear, soon became sleepy.

"How is it Kerula," he asked thoughtfully, "that this fellow Fogan Ultai is so trusted by Mir Turek. Hey, your father fears him—as he feared the *gylong*."

"I do not know, Khlit, lord," Kerula responded sleepily. "Mir Turek will not give orders to Fogan Ultai. When the master of the slaves came to Samarkand he showed Mir Turek a gold disk he wore. They thought I was sleeping, but I looked out at them, and the gold disk was made like a sun, with rays, with writing in the center. That was not long ago—and soon Mir Turek began to speak of the tomb of Ghenghis Khan to himself when he read the books."

The voice of the girl trailed off and she was soon sleeping. Khlit waited patiently for dawn. The stars had begun to fade and the fresh wind sprang up.

Khlit's thoughts were busy and he was not aware that he slept. Surely, he felt the wind on his face and heard the girl's calm breathing. They were sitting near the top of one of the ridges, and he could make out the nearest waves of sand.

The moon was high above him, and there was a faint line of scarlet to the east. No, Khlit could not have been asleep. He did not remember dozing, nor did he waken. And yet, as a mist comes from the mountains, the mystery of the desert of Kobi came from the dark wastes of sand and gathered around the Cossack, the girl, and the still figure that had been the *gylong*.

It came without warning, and gradually. Khlit thought at first that the camels were stirring. He listened and he heard the wave of sound come from the east and close around him. This time he did not feel the fear that had gripped him for a space when he saw the strange beast in the dark.

Awe came upon Khlit as he listened. He strained his eyes, yet he could see nothing. With the wind the sounds swelled, and swept over him. Khlit marveled, as he listened, not moving. And something deep in him stirred at the sounds. He felt a

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swift exultation that rose with the sounds and left him when they had gone.

Out of the desert came the murmur of many horses' feet in the sand—the feet of thousands of horses that galloped with a clashing of harness. Surely, there were riders on the horses, for a chant rose from the sands, from thousands of throats, a low, wild chant that gripped Khlit's heart.

Came the creak of laden carts from the darkness. Carts that were drawn by oxen laboring under the *kang*. With them sounded the *pad-pad* of camel's feet. The chant of the riders died and swelled. When it swelled, it drowned the other sounds.

With it echoed the clash of arms, myriad of scabbards beating against the sides of horses. Another sound that Khlit knew was the flapping of standards came to his ears. In the darkness beside him a cavalcade was passing. No cavalcade, a host of mounted warriors. The chant was the song of the warriors and Khlit's throat trembled to answer it.

Mingling with the chant came a heavy tread that was strange to Khlit. The sands trembled under the tread. The sound neared Khlit and passed, not by him but over him. This was no tread of horses.

Khlit peered into the darkness, but the sand ridges were desolate. The stars were not obscured, and the line of crimson grew in the east. Louder swelled the chant of the horsemen, and the heavy tread of giant feet.

The clash of cymbals echoed faintly and with it the sound of distant trumpets. Then came the sound of a mighty trumpeting, not of horns, but of animals. The trumpeting drowned the chant of the riders. It ceased and silence descended suddenly on the desert.

Kerula stirred in his arms, and Khlit stood up to look over the sand ocean.

"Nay Khlit, lord," the girl whispered, "you will not see them. I am not asleep. I am awake, and I heard it also. The passing of the *tumans*, with their standards of yaks' tails. I heard the wagons, and their oxen. And the creaking of the leather castles on the Bearers of Wealth. It was just as Mir Turek told me it would be. The chant of the mounted men was loudest of all, until the Bearers of Wealth gave the greeting of Dawn to the Master of the Earth."

Khlit rubbed his hand across his forehead and gazed at the dead *gylong*.

"I heard some sounds as of horsemen passing—" he began doubtfully.

"Aye, Khlit, lord. It was the army of Genghis Khan crossing the desert."

Then Khlit wondered if he had truly slept. The chant of the riders was still in his ears. But the rising sun showed the sands empty, and the camp at a little distance.

"Nay, little Kerula," he said finally, "you have dreamed another dream."

Yet when Khlit and Kerula returned to the *yurta*, they found only Mir Turek and Fogan Ultai with three camels. The Turkomans had gone, late in the night with the greater number of camels and most of the food. Fogan Ultai said that he had not been able to stop them, for they had heard sounds in the desert, and they were afraid.

VI

If a man despoils the tomb of a wise and just ruler he loses his virtue. Evil follows him and his sons. He is like a sal tree with a creeper o'ergrown.

Yen Lui Kiang, chronicler of Hang-Hi.

IT WAS the beginning of Winter when Mir Turek and his companions left the desert of Kobi and reached a small village of mud huts to the north in the Tatar country of Karakorum, near the mountains of Khantai Khan.

The desert had taken its toll from the travelers. The Turkomans had not been seen after their departure. The *gylong* lay where he had fallen, covered by the shifting sands. Mir Turek believed the conjuror had gone with the attendants. Fogan Ultai said nothing, and Khlit wondered what the master of the slaves knew of the death of the *gylong*. Fogan Ultai had an uncanny way of getting information for himself. Before the party reached the village, the master of the slaves joined them with the tidings that all the surrounding country had been vacated by the Tatars.

From a herdsman, he said, he had learned that the Tatars were gathered within the walls of Altur Haiten where they had been besieged by the Chinese for a year. Altur Haiten was one of the strongholds of Tatary, to which the retreating hordes had been driven by Hang-Hi, the general of Wanleh, Emperor of China. Thus Mir Turek's prophecy that they would find the way to

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the mountains of Khantai Khan clear, was verified. Yet Khlit, wearied by the months of hardship in the desert, saw that if the way was clear, it was also barren of food and the supplies they needed.

They had come from the desert on the two surviving camels. Kerula and the remaining stock of grain and dates had been placed on the stronger of the beasts, and the three men took turns in riding the other. Khlit saw to it that Mir Turek and Fogan Ultai never rode on the other camel together. Since the affair of the *gylong* he had been wary of the two. Yet he had noticed two things.

One—Mir Turek feared Fogan Ultai more than at the start of the expedition. Two—Mir Turek was unwilling to part with Khlit, owing for some reason to his ownership of the curved sword. This, Kerula had told him, and Khlit had asked the girl if she could read the lettering on the sword. She could not do so, as the inscription was neither Chinese nor Usbek Tatar.

The girl had borne the journey bravely, yet she was very weak when they came to the village of mud huts. She was disappointed, too, because she had imagined that when they neared Karakorum they would find the Tatar country alive and flourishing as it had been in the days of Genghis Khan. Truly, thought Khlit, this was strange; for Kerula had learned of the old Tatars from Mir Turek, and she believed she lived in the land of the Master of the Earth. Khlit placed her in one of the mud huts of the empty village, and gave her fruit and water that he found near by.

He would not have left the girl if it had not been for Mir Turek. The merchant had been in a fever of excitement since he saw the summits of Khantai Khan. His fat figure was wasted by hardships, and his frame was hot with fever. He would not rest until he had left the girl with Fogan Ultai and set out, with Khlit and the two camels for the mountains.

"The girl will be safe, Khlit," he declared, "for Fogan Ultai can not leave the village without the camels. Come, we will go to the Kukulon gate, and the tomb of Genghis Khan while the way is open."

Khlit went reluctantly. He did not like to leave the girl with Fogan Ultai in the village. He liked even less the deserted appearance of the country. He knew what Mir Turek chose to forget, that they were at the end of their supplies, and must have food.

Yet he was not less eager than Mir Turek to go to the tomb of Genghis Khan. They were near a treasure which Mir Turek said was without equal in the world. Khlit had seen the treasure of the Turks, but he knew this would be greater, for the Tatars had despoiled the cities of the Turks. Lust of the gold gripped him.

The two set out at daybreak in the absence of Fogan Ultai and rode toward the mountains at the best pace of the camels. And as the slopes of Khantai Khan rose above them, Mir Turek's fever grew on him. He fastened his slant eyes greedily on the hills, and when they came in sight of a blue sheet of water, he gave a hoarse cry of triumph.

"The Lake Kukulon," he whispered. "The books told the truth. A river runs to the lake from the mountains. Aye, here we will find the Kukulon gate where my ancestor saw the Onon Muren."

But Khlit looked beyond the lake, and saw that where a river made its way down the slopes, the earth was a yellow and grayish color. He saw for the first time the forest of Khantai Khan. The trees, instead of the green verdure of pine and the brown foliage of oak, were bare of leaves. The forest of Khantai Khan was a dead forest. And Khlit's forebodings grew on him as he urged his camel after Mir Turek.

VII

MIR TUREK skirted the edge of the lake, which was small, and followed an invisible path through the foothills, evidently finding his way by the instructions he had received from the man who had been there before. He headed toward a ravine that formed the valley between two crests of Khantai Khan. In this valley he could catch glimpses of the River Kukulon.

The merchant was gripped by the fever of gold. But Khlit kept his presence of mind, and watched carefully where they went. The Cossack was not superstitious; still, what he saw gave him misgivings. The ground they passed over was a dull gray in color, and the trees seemed withered as if by flames. The camels went ahead unwillingly. If he had been alone, Khlit might have gone no further. It was not fear of the

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mythical Onon Muren that oppressed him, or the fate of the others who had preceded them. A warning instinct, bred of the dead forests, that held them back.

At the edge of the River Kukulon they dismounted from the camels, fastening the beasts to a blasted tree-trunk, and went forward on foot, Mir Turek keeping to the bank of the stream which now descended from the gorge in the valley. Mir Turek went more slowly, scanning his surroundings, especially the river. The din of the waters drowned conversation, but the merchant signified by a gesture that he was sure of the way. Above them the gorge changed to a rocky ravine, down which the Kukulon boiled, a succession of waterfalls and pools.

The sun was at its highest point when Khlit saw the first sign of what had struck the attention of their predecessors. He halted above a large pool and caught Mir Turek's shoulder, pointing down into the blue water. The sun struck through to the bottom of the pool.

Among the rocks which formed the bottom Khlit had made out a series of white objects. Round, and white, polished by the water and gravel, he saw dozens of human skulls, and the tracework of skeletons.

"Hey, Mir Turek," he shouted grimly, "here are the Onon Muren come to greet us. Did your ancestor say we would see them?"

The merchant gazed down into the pool, and stared at the skulls with watery eyes.

"Aye, Khlit," he cried, "these are the Onon Muren. Did not the books say that twenty thousand had been slain at the tomb? It is proof we are on the right path."

"That may be, Mir Turek," replied Khlit without stirring, "yet the books said the Onon Muren guarded the tomb. Are they not a warning to go back?"

Mir Turek laughed eagerly, but his hand was shaking as he pointed up the gorge.

"There is the Kukulon gate," he cried, "you and I are wise, Khlit. We do not fear the bones of dead men. The star Ortu is again high in its orbit, and you, Cossack, have the curved sword of——"

He broke off, and stumbled forward, raising a gray cloud of dust that choked Khlit. The latter followed, muttering. The curved sword, he grumbled, would not cut the throats of spirits. Why did Mir Turek remind him so often of his sword? Khlit wondered why there were no bones visible on the ground. He thought that they had been covered by the gray dust. In that, Khlit was right. Yet, with all his wise knowledge, he did not guess the nature of the gray dust. If he had done so, he would not have followed Mir Turek further.

Khlit saw no gate, yet when they reached a pool larger than the others, at the bottom of a waterfall that fell between two pinnacles of rock, Mir Turek declared that they had come to the Kukulon gate. Here Khlit made his last protest, as Mir Turek informed him that the Kukulon gate was not to be seen. It lay, the merchant said, behind the waterfall, under the column of water. Khlit pointed to the skulls which gleamed at them again from the pool.

"In Samarkand," he said, "I swore that I would go with you, Mir Turek, to the tomb of Genghis Khan. If you go, I will go also. Yet I heard strange things in the desert of Kobi. The forest of Khantai Khan is not to my liking. I have a foreboding, Mir Turek. Men call me Wolf not because I have the courage of a fool. It would be well to turn back here."

Mir Turek thrust his lined face close to Khlit, and his smooth lips curled in a snarl, as of an animal that finds itself at bay.

"Do men truly call you Wolf, Khlit, or are you a jackal that whimpers at danger?"

"Nay, Mir Turek," said Khlit angrily, "you are a fool not to know fear from wisdom. Come!"

With this the Cossack jumped waist-deep into the pool. His heavy boots slipping and sliding over the skulls on the rocks, he crouched low and made his way along the rock at the rear of the waterfall. The force of the current carried the stream a yard out from the rock and Khlit was able to advance under the fall. Keeping his footing with difficulty he pressed forward in the semi-darkness of the place.

He was wet through with the spray which rose from the rocks. Feeling the rock's surface carefully, he found that at a point it gave way. He could see a dark fissure where the rocks divided to the height of a man. Planting his feet cautiously he turned into the opening. For several yards he made his way forward until free of the spray from the waterfall.

"We are in the caverns now," the voice of Mir Turek echoed in his ear excitedly. "The books said that those who built the

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tomb changed the course of the Kukulon to cover the gate."

The gate of Kukulon! Beyond it lay the treasure of Genghis Khan. Mir Turek had spoken truly, Khlit thought as he sniffed the damp air of the cavern. And as he did so Khlit smelled danger as a hound smells a fox. A thin, strong odor came to him, not from the river but from the cavern. Was it dust from the gray earth?

"See," repeated Mir Turek, "there is the place where the sun comes in. The cavern leads to there. Come."

As Mir Turek ran stumbling ahead Khlit saw for the first time a circle of gray light, at some distance. Toward this the other headed, as fast as his weakened legs could carry him. The footing seemed smooth, as though prepared by men. As the gray light grew stronger Khlit saw that the cavern was littered with rusted arms and Tatar helmets. Here and there the skulls of the Onon Muren lay. Strange, thought Khlit, that the Tatars had been slain at the threshold of the tomb of Genghis Khan.

When he caught up with Mir Turek the other was standing at the end of the cavern, looking down into a chasm. Khlit glanced up and saw that the illumination was daylight, coming from an opening in the roof of the chasm. The opening was round, and as far as he could see, the chasm was round, descending straight into the heart of the mountain.

They stood at the entrance of the tunnel. The path, however, did not end here. A bridge of rock stretched across to the further side of the chasm. It was narrow and rose slightly, like a bent bow. Surely, thought Khlit, the hands of men had made this. He smelled the strange odor more strongly.

He saw also, why the light was dimmed. Up from the chasm thin streams of vapor rose, twining around the rock bridge. These streams of vapor did not eddy, as there was no wind. They wound upward in dense columns through which the further side of the gorge could be seen.

Mir Turek caught his arm and pointed to the further side.

"The Bearers of Wealth!" he screamed. "See, the Bearers of Wealth, and their burden. The tomb of Genghis Khan. We have found the tomb of Genghis Khan!"

The shout echoed wildly up the cavern, and Khlit thought that he heard a rumbling in the depths of the cavern in answer. He looked where Mir Turek pointed. At first he saw only the veil of smoke. Then he made out a plateau of rock jutting out from the further side. On this plateau, abreast of them, and at the other end of the rock bridge gigantic shapes loomed through the vapor. Twin forms of mammoth size reared themselves, and Khlit thought that they moved, with the movement of the vapor. These forms were not men but beasts that stood side by side. Between them they supported a square object which hung as if suspended in the air.

As he looked he saw that the twin shapes did not move—that it was the smoke which had deceived him. They faced him, tranquil and monstrous, and Khlit's heart quivered at the sight. He had seen similar beasts once before. His mind leaped back to the bazaars of Samarkand. Of giant size, the twin forms across the chasm were like the two elephants he had sought to buy from Mir Turek.

"The Bearers of Wealth!" chanted the merchant, stretching out both hands. "The golden elephants. All the treasure of Genghis Khan is melted into the Bearers of Wealth. So the books said and they did not lie. *Akh*, the star Ortu is truly a blessed omen. The followers of the dead Genghis Khan brought the treasure into the caverns of Khantai Khan. There they molded it into the elephant-forms and hung the casket of Genghis Khan between them. Yet none left the mountain alive."

Khlit stared across the chasm in wonder. If the forms of the Bearers of Wealth were gold, there must be tons of it. Even if jewels were not melted in the gold, the wealth was beyond measure. Lust of the gold surged over him, and at the same time another feeling.

Far below him the rumbling sounded in the mountain, and brought a fleeting thought of the rumbling he had heard on the desert of Gobi—the tread of the Bearers of Wealth. For the second time a sense of coming danger gripped him. Nothing moved in the chasm, and the rumbling might well be stones dropping in the depths. Khlit peered down and could not see the bottom.

"Aye," he said grimly, "it is the tomb of a hero."

As he spoke he caught the scent of the vapors and staggered back.

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"The wealth of Genghis Khan," screamed Mir Turek, trembling. "I have found it and it is mine. Blessings to the *Teneri* and the great Buddha!"

With that he started across the rock bridge. Khlit ran after him.

The rumblings echoed in the depths below them, and the vapors twined around the form of Mir Turek. Khlit felt them close around him, with a warm touch. Mir Turek stumbled and threw up his arms with a choking cry.

"*Akhl Akhl* The Onon Muren—at my throat——"

Khlit leaped forward, dizzy with the stifling vapors. He caught Mir Turek as the merchant was falling to the rock bridge. For an instant both were poised over the side of the bridge, half-way across to the tomb of Genghis Khan.

With all the force of his powerful muscles, Khlit dragged Mir Turek back, and hauled the senseless form of the other to safety in the cavern where they had stood a moment before. His head was swimming and his throat burned with the touch of the vapors. He sat down on a rock near the suffering Mir Turek and tore open the fastenings of his coat, at the throat. It was many moments before his head cleared and he was able to see the gray forms of the Wealth-Bearers across the chasm.

Truly, thought Khlit, the Onon Muren watched over the tomb of Genghis Khan. And those who invaded the tomb must have earned the wrath of the Onon Muren.

As soon as his strength had returned, Khlit lifted the form of the merchant to his shoulder and made his way back to the Kukulon gate, under the waterfall, to the hills of Khantai Khan.

VIII

MIR TUREK had partly recovered when the two reached the village that night, but he was weak, and badly shaken by the experience in the chasm of the Wealth-Bearers. They found, however, that food was running low, and Khlit was anxious that Kerula should have medicines, for the girl was still suffering from her trip across the desert. She greeted Khlit joyfully, however, as he descended stiffly from his camel.

"Fogan Ultai has returned, Khlit, lord," she said, "and he has a plan. He has been to the edge of the Chinese camp around Altur Haiten, and he says that we can get to the city at night. The Tatars come through the Chinese lines. Then we can see the great Tatar warriors who are fighting there, and we can get plenty of food in the city."

Khlit considered this.

"Aye," he said, "it might be done. Yet you had better stay here with Mir Turek, Kerula."

"Nay, I would be frightened!" she exclaimed quickly. "Fogan Ultai says we can all go. And I do not want to be away from you, my lord, with the curved sword that every one fears. I dreamed last night that the two-headed snake you met and buried was not really buried, but it pursued me."

So it happened that when Mir Turek had recovered strength sufficiently, the four went with the camels to the outskirts of the Chinese camp, waiting there until darkness permitted a passage to the city. Khlit had agreed to this, after talking with Fogan Ultai. He did not trust the master of the slaves, who was sullen because Khlit and Mir Turek had gone to the mountains of Khantai Khan without him, yet he calculated that where his own safety was at stake, Fogan Ultai would act with them. The country around was stripped of provisions by the cavalry of the Chinese, and Fogan Ultai had promised that he knew a way to the city.

Mir Turek was eager to gain Altur Haiten, being shaken by his trip to the tomb of Genghis Khan. The merchant remained feverish, talking to himself often and startled by the slightest sound. While the party were waiting for darkness at the edge of a wood within sight of the tents and pavilions of the Chinese camp and the brown walls of the besieged city, Mir Turek laid a cloth on the ground and prayed earnestly. Kerula was in high spirits.

"Now we shall see the men of Genghis Khan," she sang, "the men of the Golden Horde. They will welcome us because Mir Turek is a man of wisdom and Khlit, lord, is a chieftan."

So Khlit went to the Chinese camp, not suspecting. With Kerula's hand in his he followed Fogan Ultai. In the darkness they followed ravines, keeping clear of the camp-fires. Seldom had Khlit, the Wolf, been trapped. Yet how should he suspect?

He heard Mir Turek murmuring prayers

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behind him, and turned to curse the merchant, with Kerula's hand still in his. For an instant the strange words of the other caused him suspicion. What language was the merchant speaking? Why had Mir Turek been so curious about his sword? And why had he given up thought of the treasure of Genghis Khan? The suspicion came too late.

They were threading a ravine within bowshot of the Chinese sentinels. Suddenly Khlit heard a quick cry from Kerula. His hand went to his sword. But the same instant a heavy blow fell across the back of his neck.

Khlit sank to his knees. Before he could rise, hands closed on him. The darkness seemed to give birth to forms that sprang at him. His arms were pinned, and bound to his sides. A cloth was thrown over his head, and he was picked up bodily by many men and borne off.

IX

ONE evening, early in the Winter which marked the first year of the siege of Altur Haiten, as related by Yen Kui Kiang, chronicler of Hang-Hi, the general of the Imperial forces sat in the Hall of Judgment in his pavilion. The pavilion was distant from the walls of Altur Haiten, but the sound of the cannon, and the roar of flame could be heard distinctly.

Hang-Hi, mandarin of a high order, master of literature, and favorite general of Wanleh, Son of Heaven, had been listening to Yen Kui Kiang, in company with his councillors and mandarins of the tribunal of ceremonies, as the chronicler read from the books of Confucius. Always, said Yen Lui Kiang, in his chronicles, Hang-Hi listened to words of the great Confucius before undertaking to judge cases that came to him for trial, in order that his mind might be open and just.

The man who commanded a Chinese army to the number of two hundred thousand was tall, with a portly figure, imposing in his robe of blue-and-gold silk embroidered with a miniature dragon and the likeness of Kwan-Ti, god of war. His eyes were dark and brilliant, and his arms crossed on his breast were the arms of a wrestler.

The ebony and lacquer Hall of Judgment was occupied only by Hang-Hi's advisors and lieutenants, seated in order of rank on each side of the carpet that ran up the center of the hall to the dais on which the viceroy of the Son of Heaven sat.

At Hang-Hi's side sat Chan Kieh Shi, old and wizened, a veteran of a hundred battles, who had no equal at chess play. It was Chan Kieh Shi who had brought the heavy cannon from Persia that were battering down the walls of Altur Haiten, and who had sworn an oath on his ancestral tablets to bury the last of the Khans of Tatary, the hereditary enemies of the Son of Heaven, before he died.

This evening, Yen Kui Kiang relates, only one case was brought to judgment. That was the case of a stranger, Khlit, called the Wolf, and Mir Turek, a resident of Samarkand whose great grandfather had been a mandarin.

When the attendant of the Hall of Judgment brought in the two prisoners, the eyes of the Chinese council surveyed them impassively. Behind the slant eyes lurked the cruelty of a conquering race and the craft of the wisest men in Asia. Not once during the startling events of the evening, did the slant eyes open wide or the breath come faster in the thin lips.

They noted silently that while one prisoner, the man called Mir Turek, prostrated himself before the dais, the other, called Khlit, stood erect with folded arms, although heavily chained. Especially did Chan Kieh Shi watch Khlit, while the Chinaman's fan moved slowly before his face. The fan was inscribed with the battles he had won.

When the attendant had brought a curved sword to the dais and laid it at Hang-Hi's feet, Yen Kui Kiang bowed before Hang-Hi.

"Gracious Excellency," the secretary said softly, "the man at your feet is one called Mir Turek, although he has a Chinese name. He was found in Samarkand by one of our agents. Many times he has sworn that he would aid the cause of the Son of Heaven and remain true to the faith of his ancestors. The man called Mir Turek says that he has news for you, such news as will earn him absolution from his neglect. He swears that he has been working for Wanleh, and that he is ready to show the fruits of his work."

"And the other, Yen Kui Kiang," put in Chan Kieh Shi abruptly, "who is he?"

"I do not know, Excellency," the secretary said, "he was taken a few nights ago

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with Mir Turek, and he has twice tried to break free."

"Oh, gracious Excellency," said Mir Turek, eagerly, "give your servant leave to speak his news, and you shall know of this man."

Receiving a nod of assent from the general, the merchant hurried on, his voice trembling.

"This man, called Khlit, the Wolf, a Russian Cossack, came to my house in Samarkand. I was curious, for he speaks as one having high authority, yet he had no rank or wealth. When he showed me his sword I saw the answer. Knowing how valuable the man's secret would be to your Excellency, I hastened to bring him, unknowing, to the army before Altur Haiten. Truly, Khlit's secret is written on his sword. He can not read. And he can not understand what we are saying."

As one, the eyes of the council turned to Khlit. The Cossack stood erect without noticing them, gazing moodily at his curved sword which lay at the feet of Hang-Hi. It had been taken from him the night of his capture, and for the first time since he had received it from his father other hands had held the blade. And, Kerula, in spite of her prayers to be allowed to share his prison tent had been taken away, he knew not where.

Khlit had made two efforts to escape, without result other than the heavy chains he wore on wrists and ankles. He had shared his tent with Mir Turek. Fogan Ultai had disappeared. Khlit had not been slow to lay his seizure on Fogan Ultai and he had sworn an oath that the other should repent it. Now, he waited, proudly for what was to come.

"Gracious Excellency," Mir Turek went on, bowing, "I saw that the man's face resembled a Russian Tatar, and the message of the sword showed that I was right. Lo, I am a student of learned books, a humble follower in the path of Hang-Hi and his men of wisdom. The sword, Khlit said, had been handed down from father to son for many generations, and in truth the inscription is ancient.

"It says on the sword," Mir Turek pointed to the blade, "that it was the sword of Kaidu, great khan of the Kallmark Tatars, and descendant of Genghis Khan. Khlit, although he does not know it, is one of the few who are of the royal blood of the grand khans of Tatary."

The fan of Chan Kieh Shi paused for a second and resumed its sweep. Hang-Hi glanced impassively from Khlit to Mir Turek and bent over the sword, studying the inscription. It was the first time he had had a sword of the grand khans at his feet.

"Wherefore, Excellency," hastened Mir Turek, "I brought Khlit, called the Wolf, to the mountains of Khantai Khan on a pretense of finding treasure, hoping to yield him prisoner to your Graciousness, and atone for my absence from the empire, and perhaps earn a place among your men of wisdom."

Mir Turek bowed anxiously and stepped back at a sign from the attendant. His face was bathed in sweat but his eyes were gleaming with a feverish hope.

"Is this all you have to tell?" asked Hang-Hi.

"That is all, Excellency," responded Mir Turek.

But his eyes fell. For he thought of the mountains of Khantai Khan and the tomb of untold riches.

"Call the agent from Samarkand, who has taken the name of Fogan Ultai," said Hang-Hi.

Mir Turek's eyes swept the assembly in sudden fear. He had known of the mission of Fogan Ultai, but he had hoped he would not be confronted with the secret agent of all-powerful Wanleh. Fogan Ultai was very crafty.

Khlit stirred for the first time when he saw Fogan Ultai enter the tribunal. The erstwhile master of the slaves was dressed in the silken robe of a mandarin of caste. Around his neck was suspended a gold disk wrought in the likeness of a sun. The councillors who were of lesser rank than Fogan Ultai, rose and bowed. The agent advanced to the dais, bowing low three times, and touched his forehead. Khlit's arms strained at the chains, then dropped to his side. The attendant was beside him with drawn sword, and he waited.

"Tell the one called Khlit," suggested Chan Kieh Shi softly, "the truth of his descent. Then he will suffer more greatly under our punishment."

Thus it was that Khlit, the Cossack named the Wolf, came to know in the tribunal of Hang-Hi, that he was descended from the grand khans, hereditary rulers of Tatary and enemies of China. No name was hated

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by the Chinese like the name of Tatar.

He listened to Fogan Ultai's words without change of countenance. His people had been of the same race as the Tatars. And he had won the respect of Tal Taulai Khan, his brother in blood, and of the Kallmarks. Khlit's only allegiance in life had been to his sword. He exulted in the knowledge that he had come of a royal line. It did not surprise him that the fact had not been known before. In the bloody warfare of Cossack and Tatar the man was lucky who could name his race beyond his grandfather. At the same time he was aware of the danger he stood from the Chinese.

"Ask him," said Hang-Hi curiously, "what he would say to us, now that he is our prisoner?"

Fogan Ultai spoke with Khlit and turned to the general thoughtfully.

"Excellency," he said slowly, "this man is no common man. He has the wisdom of a fox and the courage of a wounded wolf. He asks which should be honored, a royal prisoner or the man who betrayed him?"

X

KHLIT'S next act was to ask for Kerula. He had sought for information of the girl, but no one had told him where she was. Fogan Ultai bared his teeth as he answered, for he remembered how Khlit had made him, a mandarin of high caste, bring food to the girl.

Kerula, he told Khlit, had been offered the choice of two things, when she had come before him. She had been taken to the Chinese camp with the two others. And Fogan Ultai had given her the choice of becoming a slave with the captives who labored at the siege work, or of joining the household of Hang-Hi. The child, he said, was fair of face and body. She had chosen to become one of the women of the household when she was told that Khlit was a captive and his sword taken from him.

Khlit became silent at this, and moody. He could not blame the girl for her choice. She had chosen life instead of hardships and death. And she was young. Fogan Ultai turned to Hang-Hi with a low bow.

"Excellency, Almighty Commander of the Ming host, the man, Mir Turek, lied when he said he had told you all he knew. He knows a secret of great importance. This secret is what first took me to Samarkand, for I had heard that a scholar of that city had said that he knew the hiding-place of the treasure of Genghis Khan."

Mir Turek started and would have thrown himself prostrate before Hang-Hi, but the attendant restrained him.

"In Samarkand," went on Fogan Ultai, "I joined the household of Mir Turek, showing him, in order to avoid menial service, the gold-rayed sun which he recognized. I was not able to learn his secret, for Mir Turek was crafty and he suspected me. When he joined company with the Tatar, Khlit, descendant of Kaidu, I came with them across the desert to the mountains of Khantai Khan. From what I overheard and the words of the girl of Mir Turek, Kerula, I knew that they had come to find the tomb of Genghis Khan.

"One day Mir Turek and his companion visited the mountains in my absence, and it is certain they went to the place of the treasure. Knowing that Mir Turek planned to deliver Khlit a prisoner to you, I waited until they had come within our lines, when I took them with some men I had posted for that purpose. Thus Mir Turek lied, for he kept from you the secret of the treasure which is very great."

Fogan Ultai folded his arms into his silken sleeves and waited with bent head. Mir Turek's agonized gaze went from face to face that was turned to him and he tried to speak but could not.

"Your plan was excellent, Fogan Ultai," said Hang-Hi at length. Turning to his favorite general the commander asked: "What is your word, concerning Mir Turek, Chan Kieh Shi?"

Chan Kieh Shi shrugged his bent shoulders slightly. He was the advisor of Hang-Hi. Sometimes he thought that the latter asked too often for his advice. He wondered what the famous commander would do without him.

"Pour molten silver into the ears of Mir Turek until he tells us the place of the treasure. Then we shall have the Tatar hoard of wealth, at the same time that we slay the Jun-gar khans in Altur Haiten, and your Excellency's wars will be over."

Mir Turek stretched out his arms imploringly.

"Oh, Gracious One—Viceroy of the Son of Heaven, harken. Truly I planned to take you to the place of the treasure of Genghis Khan. Yet is the place perilous.

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The Onon Muren watch over it—the gods allow no one to come there——"

"Even the gods," said Hang-Hi ominously, "pay homage to the victor in the conflict. So it says in the sacred book."

He lifted his hand to the attendant who stood beside the trembling merchant with bared sword.

"Strike once," he said, "and sever the sinews of the traitor behind the knees. Thus will he learn to kneel to me. Strike again and slit his mouth wide into both cheeks. Thus he may learn to speak the truth."

A shriek from the unhappy Mir Turek was silenced as the armed attendant swung his short sword, without hesitation, against the back of the man's legs. Mir Turek fell to his knees. Khlit, looking around in surprise, saw the man in armor take the face of Mir Turek in the hollow of his arm. In spite of the merchant's struggles, the other twice drew the sharp edge of his weapon against Mir Turek's mouth. A choking form, prostrate on the floor, hands pressed against his bleeding mouth, was all that remained of Mir Turek.

Khlit took a deep breath and his eyes sought Hang-Hi's. The commander bent over Mir Turek.

"You will not die until you have shown us the way to the tomb of Genghis Khan, Mir Turek," he said softly. "How am I to trust a man without honor?"

At a sign from him Khlit and the moaning Mir Turek were conducted to their tent. By signs the guard indicated that the crippled man was to remain in the tent, while Khlit must take his turn at labor with the other captives.

For several days while the merchant lay tossing on the floor of the tent, Khlit went out at night under guard to the siege works of the Chinese engineers. With other Tatar captives he hauled heavy stones for the Persian cannon, and dug earthworks opposite the walls of Altur Haiten under the arrows of the Tatar defenders.

Never had Khlit seen a battle like this, and his interest grew each night that he worked. The Chinese had pushed a network of earthen mounds, backed by leather and timbers to within a few feet of the crumbling walls where they planned to deliver their final assault. Beyond bowshot of the walls the giant Persian cannon were ranged which steadily enlarged the breaches in the brick ramparts to the east.

The Chinese were not content to demolish the walls which were breached at several points. A fire from a few muskets was kept up at the Tatars who sought to man the ramparts. Mangonels, formed of giant beams, cast buckets of unquenchable fire, prepared by the special fire-makers of Hang-Hi over the walls. Into the city beyond, iron chests were dropped by the mangonels. These chests held powder, lighted by a fuse which exploded after they had fallen in the houses.

Against the Chinese the Tatars made only feeble efforts. Being naturally mounted fighters, accustomed to warfare on the plains, the defenders were at a disadvantage which was heightened by their lack of firearms. Arrows did little damage against the earthworks of the besiegers which lined the eastern side.

The Tatars, numbering about seventy thousand fighting men, Khlit discovered from the captives, had given up assaults against the Chinese. They still had their horses which subsisted on the fields between the walls and the city proper, but each sortie from the gates had been greeted by heavy musketry fire, and the terrible flames of the fire-makers.

Khlit saw that the plight of the defenders was near desperate. They awaited the day, with the fortitude of their race, when Hang-Hi should storm the walls. The Jun-gar khans, he heard, quarreled and drank their time away.

Khlit helped feed the cannon, toiling half-naked at the giant stones. He became silent, and made no effort to resent the whips of the Chinese overseers that scorched his back when he rested. Much he thought over the words of Fogan Ultai. His identity as a descendent of the grand khans, he knew, would earn him death with the fall of the city, or later at the court of Wanleh. The thought of dying a captive was bitter.

Kerula had gone from his existence. Khlit had not had many companions, but the girl had touched his heart—perhaps with her tales of the Tatar warriors. He took a grim satisfaction in the sufferings of Mir Turek. He had no hope of escape, chained and under guard. Yet Khlit counted the blows of the Chinese overseers and remembered them.

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XI

IT WAS one night when he was stumbling with fatigue, and had lost thought of everything except the stones he was hauling and the count of the blows he received that Khlit heard from Kerula. That night hope came to him again, and all his old craft.

One of his guards halted him abruptly by the cannon, and urged him back toward the tent. The guards habitually vented their fear of the followers of Genghis Khan on the prisoners.

"Come, Tatar," he said in broken Usbek, "there is a woman of the royal household that asks for you among the prisoners. Why does she want to see a dog? We must do her bidding, for she wears the clothes of a favorite."

The tent of the two prisoners was lighted by the glow from the fire caldrons near by. Khlit's heart leaped as he saw a cloaked, slender form standing beside the couch of Mir Turek. He had guessed who it was, before the girl had pushed the guards from the tent and closed the flap.

The cloak fell back from her face and Khlit stared. It was Kerula, but her cheeks were red with henna, and her eyebrows blackened and arched. Her long hair was tied in a close knot, and its scent came to his nostrils.

She gave a low cry as she saw the half-naked figure of Khlit, his body blackened with powder and dirt. She pointed inquiringly to where Mir Turek gazed at them helplessly from his couch.

"Tell me, Khlit, lord," Kerula whispered, her face close to his, tinged with the red of the flames outside, "will Mir Turek live? He told me how grievously he suffered. What have they done to you? I searched for two days and nights before I found you. Did you think I would forget you, Khlit, lord?"

Khlit crossed his powerful arms on his chest.

"The thought was mine, Kerula," he said quietly. "Yet I believed that you were the one to feel pain, not I. As for Mir Turek, he is dying of his hurts."

The girl raised her head proudly, although her cheeks flamed.

"Aye," she said, "I have suffered. I am your slave. It was my will to serve you. So I chose to go to the pavilion of Hang-Hi instead of the siege works."

"I do not understand," Khlit shook his head. "The household of the Chinese general will give you comforts and you will have honor—of a kind."

"Nay, Khlit, lord, it was for you."

The girl smiled at him eagerly. With a glance at Mir Turek she stepped closer.

"I saw them take your sword from you. Your curved sword. And my heart was heavy. Tell me, will not the noble Tatar khans come from Altur Haiten and break the power of Hang-Hi? I told them so at the pavilion, but they laughed, saying that Genghis Khan was dead."

"The noble khans," said Khlit bitterly, "will not attack."

"They will, they must. And you must join them, Khlit, lord, when they do so. See, this is why I went to the household of Hang-Hi. They watched it carefully, but I was too clever for them. I took it from them to give to you. See——"

The girl felt under her silk cloak and drew out a weapon which she pressed into Khlit's hand. He stared at it dumbly.

"It is your curved sword, Khlit, the sword that makes men afraid of you. As soon as I had taken it I came to find you."

Khlit took his sword in his hand and touched it lovingly. He eyed the inscription curiously. Surely, Kerula had been faithful to him.

"If no one suspects you, Kerula," he said gruffly, for he was moved, "go whence you have come. The tent is dangerous, for Fogan Ultai is coming at dawn and he must not find you."

"I have made you glad," said the girl softly, "and my heart is light. I do not want to leave you, but if they found me they would suspect. Now that you have your curved sword they will not keep you prisoner, will they? Harken, Khlit, lord." She drew off a slender silken girdle that confined her cloak. "When one Tatar and another are true friends they become *andas*. Each helps and protects the other. Give me your girdle."

Puzzled, Khlit lifted his sash from the pile of his discarded clothing. At a sign from the girl he bound it around her slim waist under the cloak. She touched his hand shyly as he did so. Then she tied her own girdle around him.

"Now we are comrades, Khlit, lord,

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although I am still a slave. Truly the honor is great and I am happy. When two persons become *andas* both have one life; neither abandons the other, and each guards the life of his *anda*. Thus we strengthen our *anda* anew and refresh it."

"Aye," said Khlit gruffly, "I will protect you, little sparrow."

At a warning sound from the guards outside the tent Kerula slipped away, with a glance at Mir Turek, who turned his mutilated face away. No one else entered and Khlit seated himself in a corner of the tent. He took his sheepskin coat and tied the sword deftly in the lining. The coat he placed over his shoulders. Until the gray light of dawn lightened the tent he remained motionless. He did not sleep, nor did Mir Turek who lay moaning and gasping for breath. The fire that stood in a caldron by Mir Turek's bed was smoldering to embers when Khlit arose, casting aside his coat and came to the bed of the other.

"Mir Turek," he said softly, "Hang-Hi has made you a cripple. Fogan Ultai is coming to get you to show the way to the tomb of Genghis Khan. Yet you will not do it. Do you fear greatly? I have no fear."

The merchant raised himself on his elbow and his ghastly face peered at Khlit.

"Mir Turek, Fogan Ultai would throw you down the chasm to the Muren, when you have shown him the path. You have bled much, and your heart is weakening until death stands near tonight. We two, Mir Turek, know of the tomb of Genghis Khan. You will not live to take him there at dawn."

A hoarse sound came from the throat of Mir Turek and his eyes sought Khlit's feverishly.

"Man, born to life is deathless, Mir Turek," resumed Khlit slowly. "He must go hence without home, without resting-place. So said the great Genghis Khan. A few days ago I saved your life. But now you are dying and I can not save you."

Mir Turek sank back upon his couch, shuddering. Khlit looked at him not angrily, but sadly, as at one who was no longer a man. Death, he thought, would be a good friend to Mir Turek. And he would watch until it had come, freeing him from his pain.

XII

THE sentries were dozing on their spears outside the door of the tent in the early dawn when they were awakened by the crackle of flames. There was a crash as of the lacquer sides of the tent falling in and a burst of flames swirled up behind their backs.

The door of the tent was thrust open and Khlit staggered out, his garments smoking. Inside the door they could see a wall of flame that caught at the woodwork and hangings of the structure. The sentry who spoke Usbek shook Khlit by the shoulder.

"Where is the other?" he shouted, stepping back from the heat of the fire.

Khlit drew his long coat closer about him, so that the hidden sword could not be seen. "Go and bring him forth, dog!" he snarled. "How can a man in chains carry another?"

But he knew that no man could go into the flames. He had waited until the last moment before coming out, so that the flames might get to the remains of Mir Turek. Thus he had seen to it that the body was not dishonored. And now no one but Khlit knew the way to the tomb of Genghis Khan.

An angry shout caused them to turn. Several men had ridden up on camels, and Fogan Ultai dismounted. The agent of Wanleh caught the chief sentry by the throat furiously.

The unhappy man pointed to the burning tent and Fogan Ultai released him with a curse. He scanned the flames for a moment. Then he faced Khlit and the Cossack saw that his slant eyes were cold and hard as those of a snake.

"This is your doing, Khlit," he snarled. "Once before, in the desert you slew a man of mine. You have taken the life of Mir Turek. Your turn will not wait. The torture will be finer, and longer, for this."

"Aye, Khlit," said the voice of Chan Kieh Shi behind him, "you will see if the blood of Kaidu is truly in you. We will take your life slowly, so you will not die for three days."

Khlit threw back his head and laughed, and the sentries wondered.

"When you are dead," resumed Fogan Ultai with relish, "your head will be cast over the ramparts of Altur Haiten, and the Tatar dogs will know we have slain one of their breed."

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"Nay," said Khlit grimly, "it is not I that am a dog! Was it I that made Mir Turek a beast that crawled to death? Did I send the *gylong* to murder a child in the desert? Men have not named me dog but Wolf. And the wolf knows well the ways of the dog."

"When Hang-Hi rides into the city of Altur Haiten," growled Chan Kieh Shi, pointing a withered finger at Khlit, "you shall bear him company, tied to his horse's tail. Thus will the Tatars know their kind."

"Truly, Fogan Ultai," said Khlit, "a man who is feared is greatly honored. You do me honor in spite of yourselves."

"Is this honor?" The agent struck him viciously across the face with his whip. "Or this?"

"Aye," laughed Khlit, "for the overseer has done me greater homage. He had struck me twenty-eight times."

Fogan Ultai fingered his sword longingly, but Chan Kieh Shi made a warning gesture.

"Then you can count the days until your death, which will be when Altur Haiten is sacked."

"Nay," replied Khlit, "I shall not die."

"Dog!" Fogan Ultai spat in his direction. "Hang-Hi has promised it me."

Khlit stepped to the camel's side.

"Fool!" he snarled, "blind jackal! If you kill me there will be no one to show you the way to the tomb of Genghis Khan. Mir Turek knew the secret, but he is dead."

Fogan Ultai's expression did not change but his eyes consulted Chan Kieh Shi. The old general stared long at Khlit. He spoke quickly to Fogan Ultai, and then turned to Khlit.

"We shall find the way to the tomb," he said. "The torture will make you take us there."

Khlit appeared to consider this.

"Will Hang-Hi give me my freedom if I take you to the tomb?"

"If you show us the treasure of Genghis Khan—" Fogan Ultai's slant eyes closed cunningly— "Hang-Hi may give you freedom."

"Aye," added Chan Kieh Shi, "he may do so."

Again, Khlit seemed to ponder their words. He raised several objections which Fogan Ultai met shortly. Finally he raised his manacled hands.

"How can I climb the mountains of Khantai Khan in chains?" he asked.

At a sign from Chan Kieh Shi the sentries unlocked Khlit's chains around his arms, and at his request from his feet. He was led to a camel and mounted, thrusting his arms into the sleeves of his coat and wrapping it about him. He hugged his sword fastened to the inside of his coat, over his chest, close to him as they started. Khlit rode in the center, with Fogan Ultai and Chan Kieh Shi one on either side and two spearmen to the rear. Khlit smiled grimly as he noted that they had given him the clumsiest camel.

He did not put trust in the promise of Fogan Ultai. More than once he caught the agent looking at him contemptuously, sidelong. But he said nothing.

They passed out of the Chinese encampment and gained the plain. Khlit headed toward the Kukulon Lake. The group rode without speaking, Khlit busied with his thoughts. There was no hope of breaking free from his guards, he saw, and he did not intend to try.

Khlit had been playmate with death for many years. He had never, however, planned to come so close to death as at the cavern of Khantai Khan, by the Onon Muren. He circled the lake in the path Mir Turek had taken. He thought of the dead merchant, and it occurred to him that he was the only survivor of the four who had ventured into the tomb of Genghis Khan. Verily, he marveled, the Onon Muren watched over the treasure well.

He noted grimly how his companions stared at the skeletons in the lake. But he did not pause when they dismounted from the camels, pressing onward over the gray soil, among the blasted trees. Fogan Ultai had fallen silent, and more than once the agent stopped and stared about him curiously as Khlit had done. Chan Kieh Shi, however, pushed ahead as fast as his bent legs could carry him.

At the Kukulon gate Khlit paused to explain to his companions how they must go under the waterfall. They followed him without hesitation, first the mandarins, then the guards. Khlit stood again in the cavern under the falls and smelled the strange odor that came from the chasm. Here he noted that Fogan Ultai spoke with Chan Kieh Shi but the old man replied impatiently and pushed on.

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Still Khlit had not spoken. They felt their way to the light that came down the corridor, Chan Kieh Shi turning over with his foot the Tatar forms that lined the way. They came out into the light and stood on the ledge by the rock bridge.

Khlit pointed silently to the giant forms outlined in the vapor on the other side of the bridge. The Chinese stared curiously about them, at the gray vault overhead and the chasm.

For the second time Khlit stood before the tomb of his ancestor. He raised his hand as if in greeting to the casket that hung between the golden elephants. Then he drew his belt closer about him, and spoke for the first time.

"There is the tomb," he said, "come!"

Fogan Ultai stepped back cautiously, motioning for him to go ahead. As he advanced the Chinese followed closely, their eyes straining on the dim forms across the chasm through the mist.

Khlit bent his head low on his chest and raised the sleeve of his coat against his mouth and nose. He broke into a run as he stepped on the rock bridge. He felt the vapors warm his face and heard the rumbling below. On he ran, without looking back. He heard a sound that was not the rumbling of the mountain.

His brain was dizzy as the stifling fumes gripped him. Staggering forward he fell to his knees and crawled onward. Biting his lips to keep from breathing the poison he gained the further end of the bridge and the clearer air of the plateau. A cold breeze from some cavern drove the vapors back. Khlit had crossed the rock bridge in safety.

He climbed to his feet, supporting himself by one of the legs of the elephants. His hand touched a long pole, and he glanced at it. The pole supported a crest of horns hung with a hundred yaks' tails. Khlit knew that he held the standard of Genghis Khan.

Leaning on the standard for support he looked back the way he had come. On the rock bridge one man was crawling, choking and gasping. Khlit saw that it was one of the guards, the last to venture on the bridge. He watched the man draw himself forward. The Chinese, blinded and strangling, slipped to the side of the rock bridge. Vainly he tried to gain his balance, clutching at the smooth rock. His hold slipped, Khlit heard a hoarse cry, and a white figure dropped into the depths of the chasm, after the others.

Khlit was alone in the tomb of Genghis Khan.

The Cossack seated himself against the form of the Bearer of Wealth. His eyes wandered idly over the standard, gray with dust, above him. Then he stretched out at full length on the rock, and in a little while was asleep.

XIII

In times which are gone thou didst swoop like a falcon before us; today a car bears thee as it rumbles, advancing,
Oh thou, my Khan.
Hast thou left us; hast thou left wife and children, and the *kurultai* of thy nation?
Oh thou, my Khan.
Sweeping forward in pride, as sweeps forward an eagle, thou didst lead us aforetime,
Oh thou, my Khan.
Thou didst bring triumph and joy to thy people for sixty and six years; art thou leaving them now?
Oh thou, my Khan.
Death chant of Genghis Khan

THE night sentries were dozing at the door of the *kurultai* hall where the Tatar chieftans of the Jun-gar were assembled. In the hall, where the sound of the Chinese cannon echoed at intervals, were the nine khans that ruled what was left of the Tatar race on the borderland of China. Here was the leader of the Kalkas horde, from Karakorum, the chief of the Chakars, whose people had been between the Great Wall and the desert of Gobi, the commander of the Eleuts, and others.

The ranks of the commanders of the Tatars were thinned. A Kalmark khan had left Altur Haiten with his followers when they deserted the ill-fated city. The leaders of the Hoshot and Torgot hordes had fallen in unsuccessful sallies. Evil was the plight of the chiefs of the Jun-gar, and they drank deeply, to forget.

They lay on benches around the long table of the *kurultai* council, swords and spears stacked against the walls, waiting for word of the expected attack of the army of Hang-Hi. For a year they had been directing the defense of the walls, leaders of horsemen penned in a citadel. They were veteran fighters, but they were weary and there had been many quarrels over the wine goblets.

They had been drinking deeply, these lords of Tatary, and few looked up when a man entered the hall. Yet these few did

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not again lay their heads upon the table. They stared in amazement and rose to their feet, feeling for swords.

The man who had come in was tall, with gray mustaches hanging to his broad shoulders. His face was scarred, and his eyes alert. His heavy boots were covered with gray dust, as was his *svitza*.

High was the ceiling of the hall, yet the standard of yaks' tails, which the man carried reached nearly to the ceiling. It was a standard like those of the Jun-gar, but of a different pattern. It bore a gold image of the sun and moon, tarnished by age.

Without speaking the man stood in the doorway and looked at the chiefs of the Jun-gar. Leaning on the stout pole of the standard, he watched them and his mouth curled in a snarl.

"Who are you, warrior, and what do you seek?" asked a khan whose head was clearer than the others. "What standard do you bring to the *kurultai*?"

One by one the sleepy warriors awakened, and fixed their eyes on the newcomer. A veteran, chief of the Chakars, gave a hoarse cry as he saw the standard of yaks' tails and rose dizzily fighting the wine fumes in his brain.

"Who are you, Standard-Bearer?" he asked.

Still the stranger did not speak. He leaned on the pole, and watched them until the last of the chieftains had risen.

"Evil is the day," he said in broken Tatar, "when the Jun-gar khans put aside their swords for the wine cup."

"Who is it that speaks thus to the Jun-gar chiefs?" asked the Chakar veteran. "These are not the words of a common man."

"My name is Khlit," said the newcomer, gazing at the circle of watchers, "and I am the Standard-Bearer of Genghis Khan. I have come from the tomb of the Master of the Earth with the banner of the sun and moon, because there will be a great battle, aye, such a battle as has not been for many years—since the Grand Khans were dead."

In the silence that followed the chieftains consulted each other with their eyes. The man who had appeared in the hall had startled them, and the Jun-gar khans felt a quick dread. The words of Khlit did not reassure them. The old Chakar leader stepped close to the standard and ran his eye over each detail of the design and emblems. He faced Khlit and his face was stern.

"Whence came this warrior?" he spoke in his gruff tones. "Answer truly, for a lie will earn death. The banner of Genghis Khan was like this, yet it has been buried for generations in the hills of Khantai Khan."

"From the tomb in the hills of Khantai Khan came this," said Khlit grimly. "From where the Onon Muren watch, by the Kukulon gate. I have slept at the tomb of Genghis Khan, among the twenty thousand slain. Have the chieftains of the Jun-gar forgotten the standard of a thousand battles?"

"Nay," said the old man, "it is truly the banner of Genghis Khan. For here, by the sun and moon are the emblems of the old hordes, the wolf of the Kallmarks, the doe of the Chakars——"

The other chieftains crowded around the two, and their slant eyes gleamed at Khlit. In the eyes he read amazement, suspicion, and uncertainty. Khlit saw that they but half-believed the words of the elder. He raised his hand for attention.

"Harken, lords of the Jun-gar," he said slowly. "You ask who I am. I am a fighter of the steppes and I follow the paths of battles. I found the road to the tomb of Genghis Khan, looking for treasure. Yet while I slept in the tomb a thought and a plan came to me. Genghis Khan is dead. Yet the thought came to me. It was to carry the standard that stood in the tomb to the chiefs of the Jun-gar, through the Chinese lines, so that they might have new heart for battle. If you truly believe this to be the standard of the Mighty Manslayer, I will tell you the plan, for words of wisdom should not fall on dead ears. Speak, do you believe?"

The chieftains looked at each other with bleared eyes. Then the Chakar lord raised both hands and bowed his head.

"Said I not this was the banner? Aye, it is an omen."

One by one the Jun-gar chiefs raised their hands and bowed. In their hearts was the dread of the name of the Mighty Manslayer. One of their number stepped forward.

"Aye," he said slowly, "this is the standard that was buried. But it belongs to the grave of the One. The man who brought it from the grave will die, for it is written that

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none shall come from the tomb of Genghis Khan and live. Shall we keep the standard for the men of Hang-Hi to carry to Liang Yang? Altur Haiten and all in it are doomed. How may we keep the standard, when it can not serve us, except to fall into the hands of the enemies of Genghis Khan and make their triumph greater?"

"Not so," said Khlit, "for there will be a great battle. And the standard of the dead Khan should be with the men who are the remnants of his power. There is fear in the hearts of the Chinese at the name of Genghis Khan."

He saw, however, that the Tatars had been impressed with the speech of their companion. Even the Chakar *khan* nodded his head in agreement to what the other had said.

"The battle," continued the khan, "will be the assault of the city. How can we prevent it? Hang-Hi has a quarter million men. We have a scant sixty-five thousand horsemen. The Chinese have driven us from the Wall of Shensi and across the desert to Altur Haiten. Many Tatars died in the desert. Those in Altur Haiten are deserting by night to go to their homes. The engines of the Chinese are breaching the walls. We have only spears and arrows to fight against gunpowder. Our food supplies are running out, and the men fight among themselves for what is left. We are shut in on four sides. The men are losing their strength from lack of food."

A murmur of assent went up. Khlit found no encouragement in the yellow faces that were lined with weariness and drunkenness.

"If we were in the plains," said the Chakar chief, "there might be hope. But our sallies have been repulsed. We are penned in the city. Truly, Hang-Hi is too great a general to outwit."

"Fools!" Khlit's lips curled in scorn. "Would Genghis Khan fear such a man as Hang-Hi? I have seen him, and he is like a fat woman. I have seen the fortifications of the Chinese and the cannon. They can be taken."

"The earthworks keep us from attacking on the east," returned the Chakar leader, "and the walls are breached so that an army can march through." He laid his hand on the pole. "What is the word of the *kurultai*, noble lords; shall we lay the standard of Genghis Khan in the flames, so that it will not be taken by the enemy? This man must not have it, for no low-born hand should touch it. Such is the law."

An assenting shout went up. Instantly Khlit snatched his sword from its sheath. The Chakar khan was quick, or his hand would have been severed from his arm. As it was, Khlit's sword slit the skin of his fingers which dripped blood. The others reached for their weapons angrily. Khlit raised his sword as they closed about him.

"Aye," he said gruffly, "no low-born hand shall touch the standard. I will keep it, for I am of the blood of the Grand Khans. My sword which was my father's and his before him bears witness. Read the writings, dogs!"

Several of the Tatars scanned the inscription and wonder replaced the rage in their slant eyes. The Chakar chief broke the silence.

"I bear no grudge," he said, "for this man is of the royal blood. How otherwise could he come from the tomb and live? It is so written. Yet shall he burn the standard rather than let it fall into the hands of the Chinese."

"If I am the keeper of the standard," growled Khlit, "shall I burn what it is my duty to protect?"

He leaned on the pole and watched the Jun-gar chiefs. Khlit had brought the standard from the tomb with him with much difficulty, into Altur Haiten because he saw an opportunity to throw in his lot with the defeated Tatars. He counted on the banner restoring their spirit. He had not counted on the reception he met, but all his cunning was aroused to make the Jun-gar chiefs believe in the standard of the dead conqueror as an omen of victory.

He planned to place all his cunning, with the talisman of Genghis Khan, to the aid of the weakening chieftains. He understood the plan of the Chinese camp, thanks to his experience as a prisoner. And he was burning to seek revenge for the twenty-nine blows that had been given him. Kerula had named him her *anda*. The girl had sacrificed herself for him, and Khlit was determined to win her back alive or take payment for her death. And the prospect of the coming battle intoxicated him.

Already he had won the Jun-gar to acknowledgment of the standard and of his right to advise them. But he proceeded warily.

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"As one of the royal blood, oh Khan," said the man shrewdly who had first objected, "you will take the command from us? We will yield you the command, for since Tal Taulai Khan died we have had no one of the blood of Kaidu on the frontier."

"As one of the royal blood, Chief," responded Khlit dryly, for he saw jealousy flame in the faces of the others, "I shall carry the standard of Genghis Khan. Is not that the greatest honor? You and your companions will lead the hordes, for I have come only to bring the banner, and to tell you the plan that came to me in the tomb of Genghis Khan. Do not insult my ears further by saying that the standard should be burned, however."

He saw understanding come into the faces of the Jun-gar, and they sheathed their swords.

"Did the spirit of Genghis Khan suggest this plan to you?" asked the Chakar.

But Khlit was not to be trapped.

"As I slept in the tomb the plan came to me," he said. "Who am I to say whence it came? I am not a man of wisdom, but a fighter."

"Harken, men of the Jun-gar," he went on, raising his voice, "you say that your men are deserting? Will they desert if the banner of Genghis Khan leads them? You say that the Chinese engines are breaching the walls. Are we prisoners, to stay behind walls? You say that your men are horsemen. Let them fight, then as horsemen."

The Chakar khan bowed low. This time he kneeled and the others followed his example.

"Speak, warrior," he said, "for we will listen. Tell us your plan and our ears will not be dead. We, also, are fighters, not men of wisdom."

XIV

THE day set for the capture of Altur Haiten by Hang-Hi dawned fair upon the activity of the Chinese camp. A pavilion of silk, supported by bamboo poles and hung with banners was erected for the general of Wanleh on a rise fronting the eastern walls of the city which had been breached for the assault.

Hang-Hi's lieutenants had made final preparations for the attack the night before. Junks, moored at the river bank had brought extra powder and supplies from China. Scaling ladders had been assembled in the earthworks. The ditch around the city had been filled in long ago by Chinese engineers. The cannon were loaded and primed for the salvo that was to start the attack.

Early in the day Hang-Hi took his station in the pavilion where he could see the eastern walls. Past the pavilion marched streams of bannermen with picked footmen and regiments in complete armor. Hang-Hi's advisors assembled by his chair. But the general wore a frown.

"Has no trace been found," he asked Yen Kui Kiang, impatiently, "of Chan Kieh Shi?"

The secretary bowed low and crossed his arms in his sleeves.

"Gracious, Excellency," he explained, "riders have searched the surrounding country. They have been to the mountains of Khantai Khan. Chan Kieh Shi went with the agent, Fogan Ultai to find the tomb of Genghis Khan, and since that day we have found no sign——"

"Fool!" Hang-Hi struck his ivory wand against his knee. "Tell me not what I know already. Have you learned that Chan Kieh Shi lives?"

"Nay, Excellency," muttered the secretary, "we know not."

"There are volcanos in the mountains of Khantai Khan," mused Hang-Hi, "and our men have been troubled by the sulfur fumes, which the Tatars fear, not knowing their nature. It is possible——"

He broke off, for some of his men were staring at him curiously. Hang-Hi did not desire to let them know how much he felt the loss of the wisest of the Chinese generals. Still, there was nothing to fear. The Tatars, his spies had reported, were weak with hunger and torn by divided leadership. Their number was small. And his preparations for the attack were flawless. It could not fail.

"Excellency," ventured Yen Kui Kiang, "new reports from spies have come in. They say that the people of Altur Haiten are talking much of Genghis Khan. Our spies heard mention of his tomb. It may be that they hope for a miracle to save them."

"There are no miracles, Yen Kui Kiang," said Hang-Hi softly, "and Genghis Khan is dead. Why should I fear a dead man?

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Yet the tomb—Mir Turek said that was where the treasure of the Tatars was hidden. It may be that one of them found the tomb——"

"Send me the girl Kerula, who was taken with Mir Turek," he said after a moment. "She may know something of the treasure. Still, the Tatar dogs can not eat gold, nor can they melt it into swords."

He waited when one of the mandarins of the court of ceremonies read to him the annals of the court, until the girl was brought.

Kerula, pale but erect stood at the foot of Hang-Hi's chair, and the Chinese general surveyed her impassively. Women, he thought, were a toy, fashioned for the pleasure of men, unschooled in the higher virtues.

Yen Kui Kiang interpreted the questions of Hang-Hi. Then he turned to the general humbly.

"Oh, right hand of Wanleh, Son of Heaven, harken. The girl Kerula says that she has no knowledge of the tomb of Genghis Khan. She was a slave of Mir Turek, and he guarded his secret from her. She says that men who have gone to the tomb died within a short time. And she has a strange thought——"

"Speak, Yen Kui Kiang," urged the general as he hesitated. "It is written that Heaven sometimes puts wise thoughts into the heads of children."

"It is strange, Excellency. The girl says that Genghis Khan still rides over Tatary. That he and his army are to be heard in the night."

Kerula caught the meaning of what the secretary was saying, and raised her head eagerly. Her eyes were swollen from weeping, and her thin hands were clasped over the splendor of her gold-embroidered garment.

"Aye, lord," she said quickly, "I have heard the army. It was in the desert. We heard the *tumans*, Khlit and I, and they were many. The Tatar horsemen sang their chant for us, and we heard the greeting to Dawn, by the elephants."

"Child's fancies," murmured Hang-Hi when the other interpreted. "Our travelers have reported that the Tatar herdsmen believe these tales of the desert. If a grown man believes, why should not a child?"

"She says further," added Yen Kui Kiang after a moment, "that what she heard was true. For Chinese sentries have reported armed men moving over the plains. The child thinks this is the army of Genghis Khan, coming to slay the Chinese. Then she says that last night she heard again the chant of the Tatar horsemen."

Hang-Hi smiled impassively. Well he knew that the Tatars Kerula had heard of were deserters slipping out from the doomed city at night. Many thousands had made their way past the sentries by the west walls, who had orders not to see them—for Hang-Hi wished to allow the number of defenders to dwindle. Since the loss of Chan Kieh Shi he had grown cautious.

"What was the chant Kerula heard?" he asked indifferently. "Perchance it was the dogs fighting among themselves. Although, so fast do they desert in the night, there are few to quarrel."

The cheeks of the girl flushed under the paint. All her fancies had been wound around the Tatar warriors and the great Genghis Khan. Even the beleaguered city and the imprisonment of Khlit had failed to convince the child that she did not live in the time of the Tatar conquerers. So much had the books of Mir Turek done.

She sang softly, her eyes half-closed:

"Oh lion of the Teneri, wilt thou come? The devotion of thy people, thy golden palace, the great Hordes of thy nation—all these are awaiting thee.

"Thy chiefs, thy commanders, thy great kinsfolk, all these are awaiting thy coming in the birth-land which is thy stronghold.

"Thy standard of yaks' tails, thy drums and trumpets in the hands of thy warriors of the Kalkas, the Torgots, the Jun-gar—all are awaiting thee.

"That is the chant," she said proudly, "I heard it over the walls last night when the cannon did not growl. It was the same that the riders sang in the desert."

Hang-Hi stared at her and shook his head. He looked inquiringly at Yen Kui Kiang.

"There was some revelry and shouting in the town, Excellency," declared the secretary. "Assuredly, the child has strange fancies."

"It was not fancy, Yen Kui Kiang," observed Hang-Hi thoughtfully, "when Kerula said that no men returned from the tomb of Genghis Khan. Take her back to the women's quarters and watch her. She may be useful as hostage."

He held up his hand for silence as a blast of trumpets sounded from the walls of Altur Haiten.

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"Wait: our enemies sound a parley. Go, Yen Kui Kiang and bring us their message. It may be the surrender of the city."

Hang-Hi and his councillors watched while the eastern gate in front of them swung back to allow the exit of a Tatar party. Yen Kui Kiang with some Chinese officers met them just outside the walls. After the brief conference the Chinese party returned to the silk pavilion, while the Tatars waited.

The secretary bowed very low before Hang-Hi and his face was troubled with the message he was to deliver.

"The Tatar dogs are mad, Excellency," he muttered, "truly their madness is great. They say that they will give us terms. If we yield all our prisoners, and the wealth our army has taken, with our arms and banners, they will allow us to return in safety to the Great Wall. They ask hostages, of half our generals. On these terms the Tatars, in their madness, say we can return safely. Otherwise they will give battle."

Hang-Hi rose from his throne, and his heavy face flamed in anger. He had not expected this.

"Hunger must have maddened them, Excellency," repeated Yen Kui Kiang, prostrating himself, "for they say Genghis Khan has taken command of their army. Their terms, they say, are the terms of Genghis Khan to his enemies——"

A joyous cry from Kerula interrupted him. The girl was looking eagerly toward the walls of the city, her pale face alight. Hang-Hi motioned her aside, and some soldiers grasped her, thrusting her back into the pavilion.

"This is our answer," cried Hang-Hi. He lifted his ivory wand. "Sound the assault. Our cannon will answer them."

"But, Excellency," remonstrated Yen Kui Kiang, who was a just man, "the envoys——"

He was interrupted by the blast of a hundred cannon. The walls of Altur Haiten shook under the impact of giant rocks, which had undermined their base. A volley of musketry followed, and few of the envoys reached the gateway in safety before the iron doors closed.

Trumpets rang out through the Chinese camp. The regiments of assault were set in motion toward the walls, led by men in armor with scaling ladders, and mercenaries with muskets. The attack on Altur Haiten had begun.

XV

HANG-HI sank back in his chair and watched. Yen Kui Kiang took his place at the general's side. The chronicler of the Chinese saw all that took place that day. And the sight was strange. Never had a battle begun as this one did.

Hang-Hi saw the Chinese ranks advance in good order beyond the breastworks to the filled-in moat. Then, for the first time, he began to wonder. The walls of Altur Haiten, shattered by cannon, were barren of defenders. No arrows or rocks greeted the attackers who climbed to the breaches and planted their scaling ladders without opposition.

At a signal from one of the generals, rows of men in armor began to mount the scaling ladders. The columns that faced the breaches made their way slowly over the débris. Hang-Hi wondered if the defenders had lost heart. Truly, there could be few in the city, for his sentries had counted many thousand who fled from the place during the last few nights on horseback.

The Chinese forces mounted scaling ladders to the top of the walls without opposition. Not a shot had been fired. No one had fallen wounded. The men in the breaches were slower, for the Tatars had erected barricades.

A frown appeared on the smooth brow of Hang-Hi. It seemed as if the city was in his grasp. Yet he wondered at the silence. Suddenly he arose. Men on the walls were shouting and running about. The ranks under the walls swayed in confusion. Were the shouts an omen of victory?

Hang-Hi gripped his ivory wand quickly. His councillors stared, wide-eyed. Slowly, before their eyes the walls of Altur Haiten began to crumple and fall. They fell not inward, but outward.

The eastern wall, a section at a time, fell with a sonorous crash. Fell upon the ranks of the attackers, with the men who had gained the top. Hang-Hi saw men leaping desperately into space. The men under the walls crowded back in disorder. A moan sounded with the crash of bricks, the cry of thousands of men in pain. Then the

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space where the walls had been was covered by a rising cloud of dust and pulverized clay.

Through this smoke, Hang-Hi could make out giant beams thrusting. He guessed at the means which had toppled the walls on the attackers, after the Chinese cannon had undermined them.

The moans of the wounded gave place to a shrill battle-cry from behind the dust curtain. Hang-Hi saw ranks of Tatars with bared weapons surging forward. As the battle-cry mounted the oncoming ranks met the retreating attackers and the blended roar of a mêlée drowned all other sounds.

Hang-Hi glanced over the scene of conflict. Only a portion of the east walls facing him had fallen. The rest stood. But the sally of the Tatars carried them forward into the breastworks of the Chinese. There the disordered regiments of assault rallied, only to be pushed back further, among the guns and machines. In the dense mass of fighting men it was useless to fire a musket, and the cannon were silent.

Hang-Hi turned to his aides and began to give orders swiftly. Mounted couriers were sent to the other quarters of the camp for reinforcements. Reserve regiments were brought up and thrown into the mêlée. Chosen men of Leo Tung and the Sung commanders advanced from the junks in the river. The rush of the Tatars was stemmed in the rear of the cannon.

Then Hang-Hi addressed his generals. It was a stroke of fortune from heaven, he said, that levelled the walls. The Tatars were few and already they were retreating to the city, fighting desperately. The Chinese would be victorious, he said, for there was no longer any obstacle to their capture of Altur Haiten. Surely, the Tatars had become mad. Why otherwise should they speak of Genghis Khan, who was dead?

When the sun was high at mid-day Hang-Hi's meal was served in the pavilion and he ate and drank heartily. Messengers had informed him of all that was taking place. The Tatars, they said, were fighting with a courage which they had not previously shown. They had spiked the cannon, and thinned the ranks of the musketmen.

On the other hand, the sally had been by a few thousand, who had retired behind the mounds of brick and clay where the walls had been. A second assault by the Chinese, ordered for the afternoon, could not fail of success.

In the midst of Hang-Hi's meal, came a mounted courier from the west quarter of the camp.

"Oh, Excellency," he cried, bowing to the floor of the pavilion, "we have been attacked by mounted Tatars from the plains. They came suddenly, and many were killed. They came, many thousands, from the woods."

Other messengers confirmed this. Unexpectedly a strong force of mounted Tatars had appeared and defeated the weakened regiments who were stationed on the west side. These had retreated in confusion to the north and south.

"Dogs!" snarled the general of Wanleh. "Are you women to run from a few riders? Order the forces on the south and north to hold their ground. My men will be in Altur Haiten in a few hours. Whence came these new foemen?"

Yen Kui Kiang advanced and bowed.

"Favored of Heaven," he said, "they must be some of the deserters returned. They are fighting fiercely, but their number can not be great. Without doubt they can be easily checked during our assault."

But the secretary had not reckoned on the mobility and prowess of the Horde, fighting in their favorite manner, maneuvering on horseback against infantry. Before the assault could be ordered, Hang-Hi learned that a second column of the enemy, stronger than the first had struck the rear of the Chinese camp to the north and broken the ranks of the besiegers. Yen Kui Kiang declared that the latter were falling back in orderly manner on the masses of troops to the east, but the quick eyes of Hang-Hi saw crowds of his men pouring from the north side in rout.

By mid-afternoon the situation of the Chinese had not improved. They held two of the four sides of the city—the east and south. More than sixty thousand men had fallen in the destruction of the walls, and the defeat by the cavalry. Hang-Hi found that the river at his rear which had served as a means of communication from China, hindered movements of his troops and menaced him if he should retreat further.

Assembling his generals, Hang-Hi ordered the veteran Leo Tung men to take the first ranks on the east, facing the cavalry, between the town and the river, and the

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legions of the Sung generals to hold the southern camp. The other troops he had drawn up for the assault of the city he ordered to the breastworks facing the demolished walls.

The southern camp which had escaped attack, he ordered to be watchful. This portion of his troops faced both the city and the plains, without the support of the river. Hang-Hi was thankful in his heart that the Tatar cavalry had drawn off in the afternoon. His men feared the Tatars on horseback.

He wished vainly for Chan Kieh Shi. As evening fell he heard the chant of the defenders inside the walls. Whence had come the army of mounted men? They seemed to have sprung from the plains—Chakars and Tchoros, and even Kallmarks from the horde which had deserted early in the siege. And messengers brought him word that they had seen the standard of Genghis Khan among the Kallmarks.

The signal for the final assault of Altur Haiten was never given.

XVI

KERULA had taken refuge soon after the battle began in the household pagoda of Hang-Hi with the other women. Here she took her place at one of the windows looking toward the south, listening with all her ears to the reports that were brought to the pagoda.

Night had fallen and she could not see the flare of the flame caldrons, or the flash of cannon. The camp of the Chinese seemed thronged with soldiers in confusion who passed hither and thither with torches, and red lanterns. Mounted men fought to get through the throngs, trampling the infantry. Moaning of the wounded could be heard. Kerula's thoughts were busy as she watched.

She had heard of the Tatar army that attacked from the plains. The Chinese had told wild tales of the fierceness and daring of the riders. Kerula pressed her hands together and trembled with joy. She had no doubt that this army was the Horde of Genghis Khan that she had heard in the desert. Did not the messengers say they had seen the yaks'-tails banner and heard the name of the Mighty Manslayer shouted? She had told this to the women and they had cried out in fear, leaving her alone as one accursed. Kerula was glad of this.

She listened intently at the window. She had caught the distant roar of battle in the dark. This time, however, it came from the south, in a new quarter. The sounds came nearer instead of receding. Kerula leaned far out and listened.

Truly, a great battle was being fought, unknown to the girl. Scarcely had nightfall come when the Chinese regiments to the south had been struck in the rear by successive phalanxes of Tatar horsemen that broke their ranks and threw them into confusion. For the second time the army of the plains had appeared, led by the banner of yaks' tails, and chanting their war-song. These were not the warriors who had waited for a year behind the walls of Altur Haiten. Who were they and whence had they come?

Messages began to reach the women's quarters. A rumor said that the Sung generals had been captured or killed with most of their men. Another reported that a myriad Tatars were attacking in the dark. Genghis Khan had been seen riding at the head of his men, aided by demons who gave no quarter.

The confusion in the streets below Kerula grew worse. Men shouted that Altur Haiten was empty of defenders—that the Tatars were all in the plains. Reinforcements hurrying to the south lost their way in the dark and were scattered by fugitive regiments.

A mandarin in a torn robe ran into the hall of the pagoda and ordered the women to get ready to take refuge in the junks.

"A million devils have come out of the plains," he cried, "and our doctors are pronouncing incantations to ward them off. Hang-Hi has ordered all his household to the boats."

A wail greeted this, which grew as the women surged toward the doors in a panic. Kerula was caught in the crowd and thrust through the gate of the pagoda into the street.

She could see her way now, for buildings in the camp were in flames some distance away. Beside the women hurried soldiers without arms. She saw one or two of the helmeted Leo Tung warriors strive to push back the mob.

"Fools and dogs!" growled one sturdy warrior. "Hang-Hi holds the southern camp with one hundred thousand men. The bannermen of Leo Tung are coming to

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aid him. There is no battle, save on the south. Blind, and without courage!"

But the women pushed past him, screaming and calling:

"The junks! We were told to go to the junks. There we will be safe!"

As often happens, the confusion of the Chinese camp was heightened by the frantic women, and their outcry caused further panic at a time when the Leo Tung warriors who were trying to win through the mob of routed soldiers, prisoners, camp-followers and women, might have restored order. It was an evil hour for Hang-Hi that he left his pavilion to go to the front, with great bravery. In his absence the terror of the unknown gripped the camp.

"The junks!" a fleeing soldier shouted. "We shall be safe there."

The spear of a Leo Tung pierced his chest but other voices took up the cry:

"The junks! The camp is lost."

The cry spread through the camp, and the crowds began to push toward the river front, carrying with them many of the Leo Tung men.

Kerula cast about for a shelter, for she did not wish to be carried to the river. Rather she hoped to be picked up by some of the Tatars who she knew were coming. An open archway invited her and she slipped inside, to find herself in the empty Hall of Judgment.

Lanterns of many colors were lighted along the walls of the hall, and banners of victory hung around the vacant chair of Hang-Hi. The Chinese general had planned to sit there that night with his councilors, after the fall of Altur Haiten.

Kerula ran up the silken carpet to the dais and crouched in some of the hangings where she was safe from observation.

"The junks!" she heard continually. "Hang-Hi is defeated. His men are running back from the south. To the river!"

Gradually the shouting diminished, and Kerula guessed that that part of the camp was deserted. She was about to venture out from her hiding-place for a look into the street when she heard the sound of horses' feet outside.

Her heart leaped, for she thought that the men of Genghis Khan had come. Surely, she felt, the horsemen must be Tatars, for the Chinese had no cavalry. She heard voices at the archway and listened. Her heart sank as she heard Hang-Hi's voice.

"Go to the Leo Tung men, Yen Kui Kiang, and order them to hold the other side of the river. Put the junks in motion and take the survivors of the Sung forces with my own Guard back along this side of the river. The flames of the camp will light the way. Go! The battle is lost, for those we let pass as deserters were not deserters, but an army, few at a time."

"Nay, Excellency," Yen Kui Kiang remonstrated, "my place is with you. Shall the viceroy of the Son of Heaven go unattended?"

"Does the viceroy of the Son of Heaven need the help of men?" Hang-Hi answered. "I give you this as a duty. Go!"

A brief silence followed, when the horses' hoofs sounded again down the street. A murmur of voices, and Kerula heard the doors of the Hall of Judgment close. She looked out from her hiding-place. Hang-Hi, gorgeous in his silken and gold robe, was walking up the carpet toward his seat.

XVII

KERULA did not move. It was too late to hide behind the hangings. A movement would have attracted the attention of the general, who advanced quietly to the dais. The girl wondered, for the appearance of the commander was not that of a conquered man.

He seated himself on his throne and spread his robe on his knee. Kerula watching him, saw the wide, yellow face bend over his robe thoughtfully. He was writing on the cloth with a brush dipped in gilt.

Hang-Hi's stately head turned and the slant eyes fastened on her. Kerula did not shrink back. Her eyes met the general's proudly, and the man smiled at her. Again Kerula marveled. Was this the man who had been defeated by Genghis Khan?

"Little captive," said the Chinese slowly, and she understood, for she had learned the language quickly, "why are you not with the other women? Have you come to die with your master, as an honorable woman should?"

"Nay, Hang-Hi, lord," Kerula answered proudly, "I am waiting for my *anda*—a warrior to protect me. He has promised. He is a great warrior—Khlit, the Wolf. He has been to the tomb of Genghis Khan."

Hang-Hi had finished his writing, and laid down his brush. He took a stout silk

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cord from the breast of his robe and fingered it curiously.

"Khlit said that the banner of Genghis Khan was at the tomb," added the girl. "He will come, for he had promised."

Hang-Hi lifted his head and pointed to the writing on the robe.

"This is an ode," he said slowly, "and it means that it is better to lose one's life than to lose honor by saving it. Little captive, you also will lose yours. We shall know the secrets of life and death, you and I. The banner of Genghis Khan?" His brow darkened moodily. "Could it have been brought from the tomb to the Tatars? If Chan Kieh Shi were here he could answer my question."

He listened, as a roar and crackling that was not of a mob came to his ears. He passed his hand over his forehead, seeming to forget the girl.

"Fools!" he murmured. "How could they believe—Tatars and Chinese—that Genghis Khan was alive? He is dead, and the dead can not live. Yet the name of Genghis Khan was on the lips of the Tatars, and my men feared. Fools! Their folly was their undoing."

The roar and crackling came nearer and Kerula thought she smelled smoke. She gazed in fascination at the silken cord.

"Nay," he said grimly, catching her glance, "the cord is for me, little captive. It is easier than the flames. The flames are near us, for I ordered my men to set fire to the Hall. Listen——"

Kerula heard a crackling that soared overhead. Smoke dimmed the banners along the wall. She saw Hang-Hi lift his hands to his throat. Once they fell to his lap, and rose again with the silken cord. With a cry she sped down the aisle.

The heavy teak door at the further end was closed. She beat on it with her fists helplessly, and wrenched at the fastenings. Behind her the hall glowed with a new light.

She pulled at the door with all her strength and it gave a little. She squeezed through the opening, and ran under the archway into the street.

As she did so she threw up her hands with a cry. Rank upon rank of dark horsemen were passing. Their cloaked figures and helmets were not Chinese. She was struck by one of the horses and fell to the ground. Dimly she was aware that the horse which struck her had turned. Then the black mantle of night seemed to fall on her and her eyes closed.

卐 WHEN she opened her eyes again and looked around her she was in a a very different place. She lay on a pallet, covered with straw, in a small hut. The sun was streaming into it from a window over her head.

Kerula turned her head. She felt weak. The darkness that had closed on her was very near, but the sun's rays heartened her. The hut was empty save for one man. She looked at him, and her pulse quickened.

Khlit was seated on a stool, watching her, his black pipe between his teeth, and his curved sword over one knee. His clothing was covered with dust, but his eyes were keen and alert. She put out one hand and touched the sword over his knee.

"Khlit, lord," she said happily, "you came to me as you promised you would. I told Hang-Hi you would come. But——"

A frown crossed her face as if she was striving to remember something.

"I dreamed such a dream, Khlit, lord. It seemed as if I was being carried on a horse by a warrior. I saw flames, and then darkness of the plains. Then I saw that he carried the standard of Genghis Khan that Hang-Hi feared. The standard of yaks' tails flapped over me as we went to the tomb in the mountains, and I cried with happiness. I dreamed it was Genghis Khan that carried me."

"It was a good battle," Khlit growled, "it was a battle such as I have never seen. Nay, little Kerula, was your dream anything but a dream?"

"Aye, Khlit, lord. But then the standard of Genghis Khan. Surely that was real, for the men of Hang-Hi saw it."

Khlit touched the lettering on his sword.

"Nay, Kerula," he said slowly, "the standard of Genghis Khan lies in his tomb where the Onon Muren watch. No man will go there. For the standard, and what is in the tomb belong to Genghis Khan."

In his eyes as he spoke was the look of a man who has looked upon forbidden things, unafraid. Yet when men asked him if he knew the way to the tomb where the treasure was he said that surely no man could find his way to the dead. And when Kerula told him again that her memory of the ride was real, he laughed and told her that it was a dream, among dreams.

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GRICE'S GIRL

by Wilbur Hall

Author of "The Plural Number," "Godamighty's Pardner," etc.

LYING almost under the shadow of the San Bernardino Mountains, our little town of Dos Palmas is the gateway to that illimitable desert that stretches from Hysperia and Mohave, in southern California, eastward to Santa Fé, New Mexico, and northward to Reno and Salt Lake. An empire in size, it is so arid and sun-scorched that its inhabitants are few—one big New York City tenement would house them all. And so Dos Palmas has its stories and most of them are stories that have no ending—that end in questions.

Once in a while a tourist or a writing fellow drops off the overland in Dos Palmas, and such folks call those incompleted tales mysteries and sit forward in their chairs when they are mentioned. They say that those are the narratives that make the desert and desert towns so fascinating to city-dwellers, and I expect that's true—one reason, at least. Sakes alive, though, most desert stories are mysteries, when you come to that.

I can think of a dozen; how Job Fallon left for the borax lake and never reached it and never came back; how the Twin Sisters Mine east of Keeler got its name and why it was closed down when Mitchell Storms married the second time back in Pittsburg; why Rev. Samuel Batz left the desert when the Butte Saloon was burned down in '94; why Jaspar Dass ever came to the desert and why he built his big house on lonely, barren Goose Hill, eighteen miles from anybody; what happened to Ned Nickerson when he finished laying out the narrow-gage railroad plans for the Lizard Valley Syndicate.

Time drags along, though, and unravels some of our puzzling problems and they aren't mysteries any longer, but finished stories to add to the endless collection we old settlers call "The Tales of Dos Palmas." And one of those solved mysteries has just gone into the collection. Just this last Spring.

It concerned the death of one man and the disappearance of another, the unexplained closing of a producing mine, the loss of nine bars of gold bullion, and finally the sudden obliteration of the mine itself through a landslide following an earthquake—there was mystery enough about the old Tourmaline property, all right, and all cleared in the length of time it takes dynamite to explode after the detonating cap has been fired! Twenty years of mystery and question and puzzlement, murder, robbery, wrong, malice, cupidity, and persecution—and in a breath dissipated! And Sam Grice's girl....

Old Dan Burdick was the only man of us who was in at both ends of the story. Dan built forty-one miles of the Main Line in 1896, when the railroad was straightened and heavy rails laid. Twenty years passed and he got the contract from the county to locate and build a highway from the top of the pass down to Dos Palmas, along the shoulders of Ash Peak and Hawk Mountain. It was a nasty job he picked. Young Forcythe, his engineer, was the lad who turned the trick, and engineers from all over the

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West came at one time or another to tell him it couldn't be done! It couldn't either, not on paper.

Well, at any rate it was old Dan Burdick, not a year ago now, who spun the story of the Tourmaline Mine mystery. I can see him now, sitting on a pile of ties above the depot, filling and refilling his black old pipe and arguing with the college professor who was in Dos Palmas for his cough—arguing about philosophy and trying to pin the professor down to the philosophy of the Grice case.

"As near as I can make out," he says, abruptly, in his harsh, violent way; "this philosophy of yours is the study of what's what in the world and why. I never went to school myself—philosophy ain't much in my line. But there's Grice's girl. Now how about her?"

"The—the young woman who waits on table at the Dover House?" says Professor Selly.

"That's her. Sweet and pretty and gentle—never did a minute's harm in her life, nor her mother or father before her, as I believe. And she's waiting on table for a lot of ignorant bohunks and section hands when by rights there's a mine somewheres on those mountains to the south that belongs to her and that ought to be paying her anywheres from five hundred to a thousand a month—if it could be found and the title cleared!

"And instead of being treated like the little queen she is, she's been persecuted and drove from pillar to post ever since she's been in Dos Palmas, all because of a blanked old cat that owns half this county and never said a kind word to a living human as far back as the oldest of us can remember! Who figured out that mess for Grice's girl, and wished her into it? What do you square that situation to—Plato or the Copernicus theory?"

The professor laughed a little.

"I don't know that philosophy will help much, Mr. Burdick," he said. "But suppose you tell me more."

"All right. Go back twenty year, Professor. It was twenty this Winter, wasn't it, Port Brown?"

I said—

"Nineteen years last April since the earthquake, Dan."

"Um—m—m. It was about twenty-two years ago, then, that Sam Grice, her father, first came into this camp. He was a tenderfoot if ever this desert saw one. But what he didn't know about carrying water and locating a claim and packing a burro he made up by being square and white and likable. He was too square—that was his trouble, and too easy.

"He'd left a wife and a baby girl back East somewheres, and come out here to get rid of a throat trouble and to make his fortune. The hard-boiled old birds in Dos Palmas snickered a little at the idea of him finding anything, but with the beginner's luck he runs bang into a good quartz outcrop the first throw. Wait a minute.

"See those two saw-teeth peaks due south of here with a smear of snow lying between 'em? All right, now drop your eyes a little to the right. Notice that blaze there, that looks like a brown patch? The highway I'm building comes along westward of that patch—and the patch is the slide that the earthquake shook loose nineteen year ago last April, as Port Brown says. You see all that, do you?"

"I see the slide, yes," Professor Selly said.

"Then you're looking at the wall of rock that covers the tunnel mouth of the Tourmaline Mine—covered it the day after the earthquake and did it so neatly that all the miners on earth couldn't find it without starting at the bottom and removing the whole slide. You know as much right now as any one ever will, I reckon, about the location of the Tourmaline. Sam Grice opened up that property and began to take out pay-rock right from the first. That was what brought him his bad luck, because it attracted the attention of Stanford Feather."

Professor Selly interrupted with a question and Old Dan nodded.

"Yep—that's his widow. Owns half this county and is so mean that she'd pour a cat's milk on the ground to keep the cat from wearing out a saucer lapping it. She lives in Los Angeles in grand style now but she's got influence enough—yes, and meanness enough, too—to make things uncomfortable for anybody in Dos Palmas when she wants to.

"She's made it so uncomfortable for Emmaline Grice for two years now that I guess the folks that do her dirty work are kind of ashamed of themselves and they're letting up a little. But Mrs. Feather don't

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know that. She keeps the stories alive, and if you happen to hear any of them——"

"Somebody did tell me," Professor Selly interrupted; "that this girl's father was a pretty hard citizen—that he had been suspected of stealing and murder, and that the girl was here looking secretly for some of his loot. I thought it sounded rather melodramatic and I laughed at the tale."

"MELODRAMATIC? Huh! Not half as melodramatic as the truth!" Old Dan Burdick shook out his pipe. "Stanford Feather found Grice was easy and trusting. He started by loaning Grice money. Made him take it, and take credit at the Mercantile Store. Grice wouldn't suspect a gold-brick artist if he wore a sign! He took the money, to be agreeable, and put it into the development of the Tourmaline. Then suddenly one day, without warning, he got a wire saying that his wife, back East, was dead!

"I found Sam Grice wandering around the depot that night, ten hours before the first eastbound would go through, and I took him home with me and let him ease himself a little by talking. He told me a love-story that would make most novels thin—he was one of those old-fashioned men who loved their wives with just plain, simple, single-minded love. She'd given him a great green-yellow tourmaline when they were married and he always had it on his finger. Named the mine for it—if I've forgotten to mention that. Well, he kept turning that ring around and around on his finger and telling me."

Dan Burdick stopped and spat. They were making up a freight train on the siding below us and Dan cursed the engine and the engineer for the racket—it was his way of covering over the fact that there were tears in his eyes. Presently he went on.

"Sam went East. He was gone longer than he'd expected, what with getting the baby taken care of proper, and when he came back Stanford Feather was in possession of the Tourmaline. Had a lawyer explain to Sam—and the lawyer was one of the kind that can take the Lord's Prayer, and make it unintelligible. Sam came to me, not kicking, but just puzzled and wondering.

"I told him to take a gun and run Feather off, or else hire himself a lawyer and fight. But Grice wanted to try peaceable means first. So he did. And Feather gave him a one-tenth interest in his own mine to satisfy him! A one-tenth interest in his own mine, —and that ought to tell you a lot about Stanford Feather.

"A year went by and Feather announced one day that the ledge in the Tourmaline had pinched out and that he was going to close down. He sent for Grice to make a settlement and he cheated the poor old gentleman scandalously, gave him a check for what he said was Grice's share, and offered to shake hands and part friends. Grice showed some spunk then.

" 'Mr. Feather,' he said, 'I don't claim to be a mining man or a business man, but it's plain enough to me that the Tourmaline has been stolen from me that discovered it and opened it up, and also that the vein is still there to be worked if honest mining is done on it. You've been talking about a settlement, but I want to tell you that this is no settlement and that there will be none made until you turn the property back to me—as you are going to do if there is any such thing as justice in the California courts!'

"And he walked out, leaving Stanford Feather laughing at him.

"Grice found a shift-boss named O'Toole who told him some things worth knowing and passed him a few rumors about other things that would have given Grice a case. But Feather saw to it that Grice got a lawyer who was in with the Feather gang and the suit never came to trial. It was delayed and postponed and demurred and amended and kicked around for months and months and finally Grice was broke, his lawyer quit him, and O'Toole, his star witness, disappeared.

"There's the beginning of this story, Professor—how does your philosophy take care of things like that happening? Religion pretends to—says that the wicked shall be consumed in hell-fire when they die. When they die! But what good did that do Sam Grice, with his baby girl waiting for him back East, his wife dead, his heart broken, and his mine and his money stolen from him in broad daylight? Come on, man, let's hear what philosophy says!"

Professor Selly shook his head.

"Philosophy has several resounding phrases that it uses to explain the inequalities of life and the injustices of men,

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Mr. Burdick," he said, slowly. "But they don't explain—they merely recognize."

"Recognize, eh? Well, I can go that far without a college course, Professor. I recognized the inequalities in this Grice case and I made up my mind, when I found out what had happened, that I'd take a hand. But when I had started a few lines moving Sam Grice suddenly disappeared. Between days. Just dropped out of sight. That was in October, twenty year ago. I remember, because I had a letter for Grice from the East and I went to Stanford Feather with it, asking him where Sam Grice was.

"The old thief looked at me quick, under his gray eyebrows.

" 'How should I know where he is?' he growled. 'If I knew I wouldn't be offering a reward to the man that found him, would I?'

" 'Reward?' I says. 'How's that?'

" 'A reward of five thousand dollars for the arrest and return of Sam Grice and the nine bars of bullion he stole from the tunnel mouth of the Tourmaline Wednesday night of last week,' Feather says, watching me.

"I knew Sam Grice, and I knew Stanford Feather.

" 'Look here, old man,' I says, leaning down to him, 'you haven't been drinking, have you? Do you expect anybody to believe that Sam Grice would steal a five-cent piece? And as for disappearing, I'd hate to tell you how that story listens to me. It listens like dirty work,' I says, 'and as my name is Dan Burdick I'm going to take a look into it before I do anything else on this mortal earth and you can put that down in your books for God's truth!'

"And I walked out. Within an hour I was on my way with two or three of the boys from Dos Palmas to the Tourmaline Mine, to see what we could see. We got there the next noon—and the tunnel mouth had been blown up with dynamite! The Tourmaline was closed, for a fact, and closed tight. We investigated as far as we could, but that wasn't far. There was nothing to do but go in to Dos Palmas for authority from the law to open up the property again and that we started back to do. Feather met us at the edge of town and I thought his face looked blue.

" 'Where have you been?' he says moistening his lips.

" 'We've been out to the Tourmaline,' I says, 'and we've found that somebody had covered his tracks pretty well. But they can be uncovered—and as soon as I can get an order from the courts in San Berdoo they're going to be!'

" 'What do you mean, Burdick,' Feather says, 'about covering tracks?'

" 'I guess you know,' I says. 'The tunnel mouth of the Tourmaline is a jagged clutter of boulders and dust, but I'm going to get an order that will let me clear it away and have a look inside.'

"Feather shivered.

" 'Oh, I could have told you that the tunnel had been blown up,' he said. 'That was the last thing Grice did—for revenge, and to keep me from making a search for that bullion.'

" 'What did the tunnel mouth have to do with bullion?' I said. 'You don't mean it was kept hidden away in the mine, do you?'

" 'That's what I do mean. There were nine bars—and Grice stole——'

" 'Nine bars of bullion hidden in the mine,' I said, and I saw something then that gave me Feather's number. 'You kept them there and so held them out on Sam Grice in the settlement, eh? Oh, don't bother to make up an alibi,' I said. 'And I'll be going now, too—the sooner I get to the county seat and get this thing into the hands of the grand jury the better I'll be pleased, thank you, Mr. Feather,' I said—and we parted company.

"THE first train I could get southbound for San Bernardino left at two in the morning. A little before midnight I was in the poker room at Bob's Bar putting the Grice story up to Port Brown here, and the constable and one or two others, when we heard shouts in the street and the sound of a running horse and of buggy wheels. We went out and here came Mrs. Feather, her hair streaming, and her eyes wild, with news that Sam Grice had returned at ten o'clock, shot Stanford Feather while he was busy in his living-room making up some accounts, and had ridden northwest toward Keeler!

"We turned out the town and hurried up to the Feather place, two miles north. Feather had been shot in the side of the head and there was a broken window-pane across the room. Feather had fallen forward over some writing, and when we

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stretched him out we found that he had scrawled across a slip of paper—

I, Stanford Feather, do—Samuel Grice.

"And below, here and there on the paper was the same name—Samuel Grice, written half a dozen times. It looked as though Feather had lived long enough to get down the name of the man who had shot him—and on that theory the deputy sheriff and most of the rest of them organized into posses and started a man-hunt. Me—I didn't know what to think. I had been so sure that, if we could get into the Tourmaline, we would find some trace of Sam Grice and some explanation of his disappearance, that I was befuddled.

"The rest of them rode off northward and northwestward, or went back to Dos Palmas for Johnny Maranville's hounds, or spread over the Feather place to look for tracks by lantern-light, and I stayed behind a minute and tried to get a clue there. But I don't claim to be any detective myself. The only thing I saw was that Mrs. Feather had her right hand bound up and when I asked her about it she said she had torn it hitching up to go for help. That looked all right. Everything looked all right. So I went back to town.

"Well, the posses never found hide nor hair of Sam Grice. The sheriff, who owed Feather a lot for help in his election, turned things inside out to find the accused man, but never got anywhere. And the longer the case was kept alive the longer I was in two minds about getting authority to reopen the Tourmaline. I don't suppose I ever would have decided if it hadn't been that I got a letter from the people who were keeping little Emmaline, Sam Grice's baby in the East, asking what could be done about her.

"The folks who had her were poor and they couldn't afford to bring her up without help. That settled it with me. I knew that if Sam Grice was on the top of earth anywhere he would get money to those people and to his little girl—I knew that. And so I began to move quietly around to get a court order. It was April of the next year by that time and before I had made the arrangements——"

Professor Selly looked off to the south suddenly and uttered an exclamation.

"The earthquake came!" he cried.

Dan Burdick nodded.

"The earthquake came and the next morning the face of Hawk Mountain shifted and dropped down over what had been the Tourmaline tunnel mouth like a curtain. It seemed as though God had taken a hand in the case and closed it. Maybe he did. But why? What's the sense or the reason or the Divine wisdom in that move, now? What's the philosophy of that? Stanford Feather was dead, but that didn't help Sam Grice and his little girl any, did it? Do you see any answer, Professor, to that proposition?"

"Is that the whole story, Burdick?"

"Yep, except that Grice's girl growed up in the East and finally came out here, two years ago, to see if she could clear up the mystery. Mrs. Feather began on her within a week. She was dropped from one job after another. She was talked about. She was almost arrested—if two or three of us hadn't given the deputy sheriff a word in the ear and put him on the next train to go back where he'd come from she would have been.

"The friends of Mrs. Feather say that Emmaline came out here to get the bullion her father stole and hid, and that she's going away to join him somewheres after that. Join him! If she joins Sam Grice again in all time, Professor, you may take my word for it that it won't be in this life and that's a fact!"

"You think Grice was made away with?" Selly asked.

"I've quit thinking."

"But how about Feather? Who killed him?"

"Maybe Stanford Feather did."

The professor looked around sharply.

"Oh, that is what you think?"

"I don't think, Professor. I don't know what to think. But I do know that the scar on Mrs. Feather's hand—the one she had bound up the night her husband was shot—is a long, clean cut that might have been made by window glass, say. If Feather shot himself, just for argument's sake, and Mrs. Feather found him, she was sharp enough to hide the gun and break a window and say she saw Sam Grice riding away.

"Oh, I don't know what to think, you see—and neither does Emmaline Grice. But meantime she's here and going to stay here till she gets the truth, if that means always."

I remember that story of Dan Burdick's

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now, because it told the whole of the Grice case up to that time. That was last Winter. And since then—

Well, there was Charley Piatt. He was a clean young chap in the printing office, with a lot of go to him and a little money put away. He fell in love with Grice's girl when she first came to the camp, and he tried all the ways he knew to get her to marry him. He told me about it one night.

"Emmaline is having a hard time in Dos Palmas, Mr. Brown," he said. "You know it and I know it, but she won't quit. And she won't marry me, or anybody else, she says, until she had gotten to the end of this tangle of her father's disappearance."

"That's nonsense," I said. "You could help her better——"

"Sure I could," Charley said. "But look at it her way a minute. I can see how she feels. As long as folks in Dos Palmas say her father was a thief and a murderer——"

"Nobody says that but Mrs. Feather and a few of her lick-spittles," I said.

"As long as any one says it," Piatt answered, "Emmaline Grice will fight it out alone. It breaks my heart, as it's breaking hers. But there's nothing to be done. Not until we find out something."

"Twenty years is a long time, Charley," I reminded him. "If nothing has been found out in twenty years there's slim chance that it ever will."

The boy shook his head and whipped his hand across his eyes.

"I've thought of that," he said.

And it wasn't a week later that he was let out by the *Dos Palmas Advertiser!*

Come to look into it, Mrs. Feather had taken over the *Advertiser's* debts and put a new editor in charge. So Dan Burdick gave Charley Piatt a job as time-keeper and clerk on the highway job and Emmaline Grice kept on at the Dover House as waitress and spent her odd times asking questions and prowling around and listening and hoping to hear—well, hoping to hear something.

DAN BURDICK, meantime, was in hot water with his highway construction. Young Forcythe, his engineer, had made a complete survey and set of plans for the grade from the summit of the pass to Dominican Wash, thirty miles south of Dos Palmas, and now, all of a sudden, he changed them. Instead of dropping down the cañon and swinging west along Ash Peak into a switch-back, he proposed to build a short bridge and contour around Hawk Mountain, under the slide that had been made the year of the earthquake.

Dan's roar could be heard clear to Dos Palmas. They had arguments enough on the subject and once or twice it looked as though Forcythe would have to quit. Finally it came to a show-down and Dan finally and flatly refused to consent to the change.

"I would have gambled a lot on your judgment, Forcythe," he said—they were talking in the back room of the Dover House and two or three of us were sitting in, listening—"but I won't gamble the price of this contract on blanked foolishness. Your new line runs bang across the tail of that slide of cliff rock on Hawk Mountain. Are you crazy, man? Don't you know that four pounds of powder would set that whole mass moving—and when it stopped your grade stakes would be buried under fifty feet of granite on the banks of the Dominican Wash!"

Forcythe grinned.

"We've argued it all out before, Mr. Burdick," he said, quietly. "I'll tell you now what I'll do. I've got about eight hundred dollars in the Dos Palmas National that isn't working very hard and I'd like to get it busy. You were speaking of gambling—are you willing to gamble a thousand dollars against eight hundred that I can't make a cut through that slide and hold my grade?"

"I'll bet you two thousand against two hundred that you can't!" Dan Burdick shouted. "If you have gone clean crazy draw out your money and I'll give you the hard-rock men and the powder to make the trial."

"We start to-morrow then," Forcythe said, and wrote out a check for two hundred dollars and handed it to me.

And that afternoon he started for the highway camp.

Dos Palmas heard of the wager, of course, and a week later, when Forcythe was ready to make his first experiment on the slide a lot of us drove down to watch. His theory, as I happened to know, was that the slide was not loose granite at all, but a solid formation that had shifted position and that had brought down enough loose stuff to

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cover its surface, giving it an appearance of looseness—of débris and boulders—that was false.

And if he was right, and he could blast a cut through the slide at its lower end and get a permanent grade there he would shorten the Hawk Mountain road about two miles and save Dan Burdick anywhere from eight to fourteen thousand dollars on his contract.

Well, as I say, a good many of us drove down to see Forcythe touch off his battery of shots in that experiment of his. We got there about noon and at one o'clock everything was ready. Forcythe had eighteen deep holes and an electric battery to fire them. He stood on a rocky shoulder across a draw and the rest of us stayed back with Dan on the end of the old grade, where the road work had been stopped by Forcythe's change of plans. When we were all set Dan Burdick waved his hand.

"The danged kid is wrong," he said to us, emphatically, "but I don't mind telling you fellows that I hope he isn't. If the rock holds——"

The earth shook under us, suddenly, stopping Dan in the middle of a word. After the shake there was a cracking *boom-m* and then a crash and the thunder of rock riven and lifted into the air. The whole mountain side opposite us seemed to lift and settle and lift again, and a cloud arose, out of which great rocks and splinters of rock catapulted through the atmosphere and blackened the sky.

Before the dust settled we heard Forcythe's hard-rock men cheering. The great slide seemed to us to be moving downward, but actually nothing but the surface boulders and shale shifted. And from where they were they could see that Forcythe had been vindicated—had won his bet!

Meantime, however, the young engineer was standing still on his rock, staring. After a moment or two Dan Burdick put up his hands and hallooed.

Forcythe turned our way and beckoned. Then he called to a workman below him pointing and giving him some word. The man nodded, shouted, and started for us. With one accord we stumbled down the hill and slid and scrambled across the intervening cañon. Half-way we met the miner.

"Howly, howlin' Moses, but she's a shot for your whiskers!" he cried, panting. "Misther Forcythe wants ye should come an' hav' a look. The powdther has tore out a gapin' chasm into the enthrails of the world! Come an' take a pape!"

We were coming, as hard as we could. But we got there after Forcythe—long enough after him so that he and Charley Piatt could reach the cut and that black hole the blast had uncovered—a timbered tunnel-mouth from which cold air, smelling of damp and mold, came out — the mouth of the lost Tourmaline Mine!

And, inside, Forcythe, flashing his pocket-lamp before him, knelt beside a skeleton—the yellowed bones of a man long dead—and picked up, as we arrived, breathless and unbelieving, a corroded finger-ring, in which still shone the green and yellow of a tourmaline, and a rusted bowie knife, on the haft of which was cut—

S. Feather, '86

PERHAPS you've heard of the Tourmaline Mine, on Hawk Mountain. If you happen to know any of those lucky people who own Tourmaline stock, too, you've heard that the ledge hadn't pinched out, back in those days when Stanford Feather robbed and then murdered Sam Grice, and blew up the mouth of the tunnel to avoid detection.

But maybe you never heard that we kept Emmaline Grice from knowing that we found the lost ledge until we could clear her name and give Charley Piatt a chance to marry her. Because Charley wouldn't have married her at all, otherwise, having peculiar notions about his own poverty as against her riches.

So she wasn't rich until she was Mrs. Piatt—Dos Palmas saw to that. And we gave them the missing bars of bullion—nine of them that we found in Stanford Feather's *cache* in the second cross-cut—we gave them those nine bars for a wedding present and later they built the Dos Palmas Hospital with the money.

Dan Burdick wrote a letter to Professor Selly and told him the end of the story. And the professor telegraphed back:

Philosophy takes off its hat to engineering. For additional information see Job 28—9 and 11.

FRANCIS SELLY.

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MURDER! by Gordon Young

Author of "His Wonders to Perform," "Heathens," etc.

THE trouble started for Berg when the woman furtively laid a note on his table as she passed out behind her escort.

Berg had never seen her before, though he did remember having noticed the man in the café on previous occasions; but he expected to see her again, especially after reading the note:

Please, please meet me this 2 A.M. at 44 Clinton Square. I am lost if you do not come.

The orchestra played "La Paloma," and a fat girl who tried to appear Spanish strolled among the tables doing her best to sing it; and when Berg turned to stare after the woman the plump señorita caught his eye and gave him a flirtatious smile. He quickly averted his face. Berg did not like fat girls, anyway. He was peculiarly attracted by dark, slender women who had in their eyes that which boded passionate dangers. Even people who liked him said that Berg was pretty much of a fool—as any boy was likely to be if he had more money than was commensurate with his years.

A solicitous waiter poured an ounce of water into Berg's iced glass and suggested a small black. Berg accepted, then with an effort to be casual about it, inquired as to who was the woman—the slim, dark woman with the leopard skin flung over her shoulder—and the tall, heavily built man with the face of a degenerate Roman emperor, that had just left the table in front of him.

The waiter did not know Berg. He had seen him a few times in that queer little café where all kinds of people came, and knew that he ordered discriminatingly and was not fussy about a padded bill; so naturally the waiter sought to please. If he had known that this was Berg Douglas, son of the late J. J. Douglas, the waiter would probably have really exerted himself; for if J. J. Douglas had left only half as much of an estate as the papers reported, there was scant danger of Berg going bankrupt even though he did all the foolish things which were credited to him by gossip.

But he did not. He did others, just as foolish perhaps, certainly as extravagant, but the gossips didn't know of them. Berg, no matter what else he might be after, was not eager for notoriety. So he avoided the places where he was known. It made him uncomfortable to be pointed out and stared at from around palm leaves and pillars.

"Yees," said the waiter, rubbing his hands and bending forward, "the gentleman is Meester Marvin—Meester Gerome Marvin. An' heez wife."

"And who is he?"

"Ooo," the waiter said in tones of surprise and apology; then hurried on to make the best of his inadequate information: "he iz a gentleman zat comes here freequently. I do not know who he iz. We are not inquiz-ative into the affairs of our patrons. A small black, sir?"

"How do you know the woman is his wife?" Berg persisted.

He was used to having things he wanted.

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Berg did not notice that the señorita had finished her song. He did not perceive that she was standing close beside him, an artificial smile on her face and her head poised momentarily to listen. But when she complacently dropped into a chair across from him, he could not longer fail to notice. She interrupted the reply that the waiter had started to make and curtly asked for a cocktail, then began telling Berg how pleased she was that he had liked her song.

He had not liked her song. He did not like her. For one thing her voice had the hoarseness of the woman who smokes many cigarets, and she put one to her lips and indicated that she was waiting for him to strike a match for her. He struck it.

For another thing she appeared rather old at close view and flagrantly rouged. But worst of all, there was something about her that bespoke determination, a definite persistence. She was forcing herself on to him, not only taking it for granted that she would be welcome but apparently determined to exact some kind of welcome whether or not he wished to give it.

He might insult her. But he did not like to insult women, even those he did not like. He did not recognize that he had it, but there was a strong element of chivalry in him. He might ignore her. But she might make a rumpus. One could never tell about these women who had lost the flush of youth. They usually had enough experience to counterbalance the loss of charm.

Berg surveyed her coolly, just coolly enough to indicate that he was by no means overjoyed that she had selected him for her attentions.

The fat señorita was imperturbable. She as coolly blew her cigaret smoke across the table and as coolly chatted on as though she and Berg were old friends.

Berg did not listen until he caught——

"Often I sing it at Mr. Marvin's request and——"

"Marvin? Say, who is he, anyway?" Berg asked with sudden interest, forgetting that she was fat, rouged distressingly, and parasitically flirtatious.

"Who is she?" the señorita asked responsively, as though having mistaken the pronoun. "Funny looking, isn't she? So skinny."

Douglas would have liked to throw something. He never could endure the cattishness of women, and for this fat woman with bodice laced till she could hardly breathe, with a long fringed shawl across her thick shoulders, and a curl—he was sure it was artificial—dangling from under the rose in her hair down to a fat creased neck, to speak of the exquisite lady as "skinny" made him want to say reckless things about what constituted beauty.

"Who is she?" he persisted, accepting the pronoun.

"You know as much about her as I do. Maybe more. I saw you watching her. Did you think she was an old friend or something?"

"Did I watch her?" Berg replied, knowing very well that he had but wishing to appear innocent.

He did not like the way the señorita watched him. He felt that she was withholding something that would be interesting.

"Oh, no," she answered impudently, "you just sat here and looked——"

She dropped her jaw, thrust her head forward and stared blankly across the table, purporting to give Berg a picture of how he had acted.

It was so rude and crude as to be painful. Berg disliked vulgarity. He turned his head away and pretended to be watching something across the room. He thought that she must certainly take the hint and leave him; but she didn't. She signaled the waiter, called him Fritzy and requested another cocktail.

Berg thought of leaving; but it was a long time, almost three hours until 2 A.M. when he was to keep a most outlandish tryst. He wished this Spanish person would either move away or talk of Mrs. Marvin—Mrs. or Miss. He wondered which, but was quite sure that she was not a miss. Unfortunately, Berg was one of those men who do not care a great deal.

If flirtations with misses are less dangerous, it is certain that they lack the spicy element of risk. Few people, unless very strict in their views, would have called Berg an "evil fellow." He took his fun where he found it and was, as has been said, a good deal of a fool, putting his head into all kinds of nooses and getting no wisdom out of such times as he had narrow escapes.

He thought Mrs. Marvin the most fascinating woman he had ever seen. He had thought that of many previous women, and

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many of them had been fascinating, too. Mrs. Marvin, if she were a Mrs., was evidently aware of her fascination. No woman of commonplace charms would presume to lay a note on the table of a stranger and ask him to meet her at 2 A.M.

If Berg had been forty-four instead of twenty-two he might have scrutinized that invitation carefully; but in his own mind, though he did not really put it into concrete thought, he had an impression that she was neither Mrs. nor Miss Marvin, but some woman more or less attached to Marvin and who would be free after 2 A.M. to receive a fairly good-looking young fellow who had not been at any pains to hide his admiration for her.

"Still dreamin' about the skinny siren?" the señorita asked.

"Whom do you mean—skinny?" Berg replied, defensively.

"Well, young Tommy boy, Marvin's a bad actor with a rep. behind him for eating green youths, so take a tip from sister Ann and run along home. I'm being good to you, kid," and she rose from her chair, gave Berg an affectionate pat on the cheek and moved out of sight through the palms over by the orchestra.

Berg was, or thought that he was, a rather blasé man about town. The ambition of youth is to appear blasé, and of age to appear enthusiastic. But the Spanish person had left him almost flustered. She had really not been flirting or trying to flirt with him. It made his face rather flush to realize that. She had been playing with him, and the parting shot had been given in a sort of motherly tone and in accents not at all cynical. He felt that she meant it, and that she knew something which she could have told and did not.

Fritzy came by and Berg stopped him to ask who she—the Spanish person—was. The waiter must have thought Berg a very curious young fellow to be inquiring so much about people.

"Señorita De Fanelli, sir," the waiter informed him.

"Oh ——, no. I mean her real name."

The waiter pretended remonstrative surprise.

"Here," Berg said, laying a dollar on the edge of the table, "now who is she?"

"Maggie McGuire," the waiter whispered low, "but if pleaze, sir, nevar let her know that I have told you, sir."

"No fear. The oyster's my favorite rôle."

And Berg smiled wisely, the man of the world smile, a trifle consciously condescending to make a waiter something of a confidant.

If he could have stood in the little room just off where the orchestra was seated and listened to the conversation over the telephone he would probably have lost his smile; for his name, coupled to that of Marvin went over the wire and into the ear at the other end. The man at the other end was one of few words. When she had finished he simply said: "Thanks, Maggie," and hung up.

II

AS BERG rode down to Clinton Square in a taxi he began to wonder whether it were after all a wise thing to approach a strange house and ask for—he knew not whom—at that time of the night. Queer little cold thrills ran over his body. It was undoubtedly exciting to be on such a quest, and he had schooled himself to believe that he liked excitement. There can be no excitement unless there is the element of risk.

She had been a beautiful woman; a trifle sad as he remembered her face—a beautiful, pale slender face, with luminous dark eyes and dark hair. There was mystery in those eyes. She was a woman who could tell strange true tales of herself if she chose. And that leopard skin thrown over her shoulder: that was something original and picturesque. Most women would have looked ridiculous with it. It had heightened her mystery, gave her an air of distinctiveness.

But Marvin—he had seemed to be no weakling. In remembering him Marvin seemed larger, more strongly built, than Berg had at first noticed. He could make things unpleasant. Not so very, though. Berg could call and if any one other than the woman herself came to the door, he could inquire for some fictitious person and apologize for having made a mistake in the address.

That Irish imitation of a señorita had apparently known something; but still she might have been hinting darkly just out of pure jealousy for the coolness with which he had treated her.

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Oh well, Berg reflected reassuringly, it was all in a lifetime; and there was no fun in not taking chances; and certainly such a woman as that was worth risking all manner of things for. It might be that she was in trouble and needed him. It might be any one of many things, and he was not only willing but eager to be of service in any case.

As the taxi entered the square Berg put his head out of the window; and before they reached the number he surmised that it must be the house where a light was burning on the porch.

It was.

Berg told the chauffeur to stop under the trees two doors on the near side of 22 Clinton Square and wait. He stepped from the taxi, paused to adjust his hat, smoothed his coat, felt in his pocket for a handkerchief and wiped his moist hands, then flicked the imaginary dust off his well-polished shoes, looked up and down the street as though he were about to do something lawless and wished for no spectators; but as a matter of fact he was just a little bit nervous and would have felt slightly relieved at the sight of a burly policeman sauntering along.

Berg wore rubber heels, but walk carefully as he might, without tiptoeing or anything of that kind, yet his footsteps seemed loudly grating on the cement. He had never noticed before that the casual footstep made so much noise and the vagrant wonder went through his head as to why there was not a deafening clatter on the down-town streets from the thousands upon thousands of feet pattering on the sidewalk.

He turned in at 22 Clinton Square peering at the windows. He had looked at his watch in the taxi and knew he was just on time, and from the window he rather expected to see her face on the lookout for him. On the right side in the front room a dim light was burning. Through the heavy curtains it appeared very dim, especially in contrast with the flood of light from the globe on the porch. It was a large, ample, fairly prosperous-looking house as most were on the square.

He went up the steps and waited a moment, but no one had apparently been watching for him. Then he gently dropped the knocker and waited. No answer. Growing rather ashamed of himself for being so timid he lifted the knocker and banged it twice, hard.

Presently—almost at once—the door opened. She stood before him but with a warning look in her eyes and her fingers pressed significantly against her lips.

"*Sssh*—come in," she whispered. "Don't speak. Just go in that room there and wait. I'll come as soon as I can." Then with a touch of fear in her voice she added tensely: "He's not gone to bed yet. I've been watching for him to go up the stairs. I don't know where he can be. I saw him just a moment ago. But you slip in there and keep quiet. Don't move around."

Before he realized what was happening to him, Berg had been pushed through the heavy portières into the large dim room, and she was gone. It was almost dark. The light that he had seen burning was a small electric bulb on a light-stand near the window. He noticed its extremely small size and wondered what the reason was for it. It gave practically no light.

He sat down on a fat-bottomed plush chair and held on to his hat. The house was silent; the strange nocturnal silence of the dark hours of early morning when vague noiseless flittings seem to be going on all about one. Berg did not at all like the idea of being there alone. He did not wish to be there at all. That man was not only in the house, but he was up and around some place—perhaps prowling about watchfully. Perhaps he had seen Berg come.

It was very unpleasant to think about, but he could not think of anything else. He wished himself out of the house, and once he stood up and turned toward the portières, but either some one passing noiselessly struck them so that they bellied inward or he imagined it. Anyway, he drew back, his heart palpitating wildly, and sat down. He sat very straight and stiffly, ready to bounce up—and he kept his eye on the portières except now and then as he hastily glanced about the room, vaguely afraid of—he knew not what.

Berg told himself that he had been a fool to come. He was Berg Douglas, a young man well known about town; a boy worth millions, and as amiable and generous as any one, and here he sat with brows scowling nervously and anything might happen. Berg did not exactly think of himself as worth so many millions, or of being amiable and generous, but he felt that he was getting into a bad mess that he did not deserve to be in.

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The parting words of the Spanish-dressed Maggie McGuire came again and again to mind like the sinister motif of a tragic opera. He ought to have been more decent to her, for she had evidently known something definite and would have told. Perhaps what she could have told him would have kept him away. He wished he had heard something like that.

THE woman who had come to the door was the leopard woman of the café: beautiful, yes—but frightened. There is something contagious about frightened women. They make a fellow feel damnably uncomfortable. Berg wished that he had gone home and gone to bed—or rather to the club, for he did not live in the house that had belonged to his father and to his grandfather. It was too big and gloomy for a young bachelor. The fellows at the club would just about now be drifting in from the supper parties after the shows, or from rides to taverns, or knocking around. They were sitting about the tables laughing and talking—he was going.

He arose resolutely and started for the doorway.

But before he had taken two steps a door opened at the other end of the room, and a flood of light came through, silhouetting a bulky body.

Berg turned, terrified, shaking, simply paralyzed into momentary inaction.

For a second there was silence; then an angry, ominous, full-throated man's voice shouted at him:

"Who are you? What're you doing here?"

Berg absolutely could not reply. He tried to say something, he could never remember what, but his throat contracted and no sound came out of it.

He could see the man's body against the light, but he could not see the face. He did not need to. It was Marvin.

"After my wife, heh?" Marvin growled, crouching and coming forward stealthily like a gorilla at a trapped marmoset.

Berg shrank back struggling to speak. He dropped his hat and instinctively lifted his hands to ward off the blows.

Then Marvin rushed, and huddled against the wall Berg whispered hoarsely in protest—

"No, no, no."

He was trying to scream!

It was not altogether cowardice that made Berg pitiable. For one thing he was very young and used to the world's comforts; but more than that, he was guilty and knew it. Cold, cold nerves it takes to stand up to an outraged husband when his home has been invaded. Righteous wrath is the most terrible fighting energy known to man. Berg had none of it, and he felt doomed.

Then the miraculous happened. So far as Berg could tell, nothing stood between him and a vicious assault, perhaps death. But Marvin suddenly stopped and staggered back as though from the impact of a terrific blow; and he clutched at his breast as he sank writhing to the floor, where he lay on his back in the full glare of the light that streamed through the doorway.

On his breast, just above the heart, was the handle of a dagger, a large-handled dagger, and blood trickled down the white shirt front.

Berg had seen no one. He had heard no one. So far as he knew there had been no one in the room excepting himself and Marvin, and certainly there had been no one close enough to bury a dagger up to its hilt in Marvin's breast. It takes a strong hand at one blow to sink a dagger to the hilt, and few other than Sicilians can drive unerringly a point between the ribs. Berg turned his head from side to side, fearfully searching for whoever had come to his rescue. But no one was visible.

In a sort of fascination of terror he approached the prostrate body. Death seemed to have been instantaneous. Marvin did not speak after he was hit, or move after he fell. His body lay crumpled and twisted as if smitten by invisible lightning. The death thrust had been invisible, but the lightning bolt was present in the shape of a dagger's handle.

It was incomprehensible and fearful; in a way more fearful than Marvin's onslaught. For the first time in his life Berg knew the horror of standing above a dead man whose blood was not yet cold. Scarcely knowing what he was about he stooped; but as he did so a form appeared in the doorway casting a shodow upon him and a low, frightened, terrified cry beat at his ears.

"You have killed him!" the woman said.

In her voice reproach, admiration, alarm, were subtly blended.

"I didn't—I didn't do it!" Berg protested

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fearfully, straightening himself and backing away a little.

"He isn't dead then?" She hastily stooped over the body and he bent slightly beside her. "Yes—yes, he is dead. You will be caught. What shall we do!"

"I didn't do it. He came at me—then suddenly stopped——"

"In self-defense—but it would be awful in court!"

"But I tell you, I didn't do it!" Berg almost screamed.

"*Sh*—the servants will hear. We must think of something. I can't say that I asked you here. Oh, why did I do it? I wanted you to come to me—but to have to say that in court. I couldn't do it. My name—my reputation—oh, what shall we do, what shall we do?"

She was so pathetic, and so near him that Berg instinctively put a supporting arm around her. His only thought was to comfort her. And she turned close to him and dropped her head, sobbing on his shoulder. Berg held her tight and looked down at the bleeding body on the floor. He knew that the situation was desperate; but he could not force himself to feel it. He realized that innocent as he was he might be held for murder, but it seemed that it could not possibly be he, Berg Douglas, who would be held.

There was deep mystery here. He was as much interested and more concerned than a policeman would be. He wanted to tell the truth and listen to the conjectures of how it could have happened.

"What shall we do?" the woman persisted, turning her beautiful face close to his, so close that as though magnetically drawn his lips pressed hers unresistingly.

"I don't know," Berg confessed, frankly.

"If you get away—then I will be arrested for it."

"You!"

"Yes. I hated him. The servants know it. They hate me, too. All but Jules."

"My Lord!" Berg was beginning to realize that there were fearful complications.

"I shouldn't have let you in. I shouldn't have given you that note, but I did so want you to come to me."

"And I wanted to come," Berg said with weak gallantry. "Was he your—your——"

"Yes. My husband. That's what makes it awful—you being in the house—this way."

"What shall we do?" he asked, unconsciously echoing her own question.

"You could run away—no one knows you are here—you could run."

There was subtlety, the deep, deep subtlety of the woman in that. If she had said "you could leave," or "you could go," Berg might have been tempted—for he was growing really terrified at the complications—to leave the woman to get out of the situation as best she could. But no man "runs away."

"And leave you to be arrested! No!" He said it resolutely. It was perhaps cheap heroism. He would like to have got away. If she were arrested he could aid her anonymously with money for defense. He did turn the various aspects of the matter over in his mind. He was impulsive—rather than thoughtful; and he did not want to be arrested. He was innocent. If any other innocent person were arrested, that would be too bad; and he would not be indifferent to the plight of that person.

However, with a woman in one's arms, clinging helplessly, lovingly, there is no possible answer but the one expressive of determination to stand by her, to defend her—not to run away.

She rewarded him with a convulsive embrace and a quick, passionate kiss.

"If I turn out that light and shut the door he won't be found till morning," she said speculatively.

"Yes?"

"We could be far away."

THAT brought him up with a jolt. He had just finished an oath that he would not run away and leave her. Obviously he could not remain there over that body until a policeman walked in and tapped him on the shoulder. And if he left, she must leave with him; and she would be on his hands. She was beautiful, but the city was full of beautiful women—none of whom had got him into such a fix. And though he responded with lips, caresses and even words, to her beauty, still he did not feel the passion of the lover. Blood, even that of other men, when spilled takes the heat out of love.

"Where could we go?" he asked, vaguely resenting the way fate was closing in on him.

"Any place—any place, with you!"

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The woman was irresistible. He kissed her again.

"Who could have done it?" Berg asked when she had drawn away her lips.

"Why be ashamed of it—before me?"

There was a challenge in her voice. It was as if she was ready to be angry with him for having done something definite and precious for her, then trying to deny it for fear of what others might think.

Berg was put into a plight. He was young, inexperienced and foolish enough to find it pleasant to be a hero in woman's eyes though it entailed putting his neck into a noose, but he was far from being hardened enough to be glad of anything like murder. So he changed the subject.

"I have a taxi waiting."

He had just thought of it.

"The very thing. What luck! We could be traced so easily in one of my cars."

The idea of being traced, of continuing to be responsible for murder after getting out of the room, gave Berg a cold thrill. He dropped his arm from about her waist and stooped to his hat.

"Let us get out."

"Whither thou goest I will go," she answered, with mingled playfulness and intense meaning.

Berg felt irritated that she could even come so close to smiling. What if she did hate her husband; there had no doubt been a time when she had pledged him love with those warm lips. At that moment Berg would have given much to be away from her.

They turned out the lights, even the little, faint light in the room that could scarcely be seen through the window, and which by its dimness had made the tragedy all the more dramatic when the strong glare, with all the effectiveness of a spotlight, shot through the open door at the other side of the room. Then they sneaked from the house.

As the taxi moved away the woman said:

"I haven't a friend in the city. Scarcely an acquaintance. I am all alone."

"You don't know even that Spanish singer—at the café?" He asked it quickly, unthinkingly.

"Who?"

"The woman that calls herself some kind of a foreign name. Gets her pay-check under that of Maggie McGuire."

"McGuire? No. Why do you ask?" There was the faintest trace of suspicion.

"She mentioned your husband."

"Gerome Marvin? What did she say?" It was a command, sharply given. Even sirens have claws—the sharpest of all, too.

"Nothing. Just mentioned him."

"Why?"

"She was chatting with me to-night. Said he liked her song—or singing. I don't remember. Fat woman, she is."

"What did you talk about? Was it after I left you? Did she see me drop that note?"

"Don't see how," he replied, answering the last question first and ignoring the others. It seemed the most important. "What difference would it make?" He was thinking of the fact that he had not told any one who he was. If the Spanish person, Maggie McGuire, saw Mrs. Marvin give a note to a young man—well, there were hundreds of thousands of young men in the city; and he never expected to go back to that café again. It also gave him some satisfaction to think that Mrs. Marvin did not know who he was.

If it actually came to the worst he could drop from sight—and she could look all she pleased among the city's young men. He would be in Bermuda or Tahiti. Berg did not intend to run away, but it was reassuring to know that he could. Mrs. Marvin was not so fascinating as she had seemed at first.

After a thoughtful silence she said—

"Let us hope she did not see."

Another thoughtful silence and Berg could have shouted with joy when she said:

"We mustn't stay together—not tonight, anyway. When the body is found they will begin to look for me, and if I were found with you, dear—see how it would be? I don't want them to find me, but if they find either of us, it would be better that it were me. I am innocent, and I could say that Gerome and I had quarreled and I had left him. I have before now."

That was thoughtful and generous of her. Now that she was going from him, Berg pressed her hand affectionately, and she put up her lips for a more intimate caress.

They drove up to a hotel, not the one at which she was going to stop—for the chauffeur must be thrown off the trail, she said—but the one at which she was going to pretend to stop. Berg rather admired and at

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the same time was afraid of her thoughtfulness for details of the kind. It all had the air of premeditatedness.

"What shall I do?" she said suddenly. "I came off without a purse——",

Instantly he had emptied his pocket and brought out his wallet.

"Here—take it all. It's little enough."

She thanked him politely, for the taxi had stopped. She would not let him alight first to hand her out for fear that some one might notice that they were together and recognize either him or her; and with a feeling of inexpressible relief, Berg saw her get out and disappear under the marquee without having even asked his name or address. She had not, he remembered afterward, even told him the hotel at which she would eventually put up.

He felt that he was free. Not that he would desert her. No. But then—she did not get from him his name.

He drove to his club feeling relieved in one sense and extremely depressed in another. He had time to think over the tragedy, and the more he thought the more incomprehensible it seemed to him. No one could have been in the room without his knowing it. And yet that dagger had certainly been driven by some hand close to Marvin's body. Berg had a strange feeling that the woman herself had killed him; but she could not possibly have got out of the room and around to the doorway through which Marvin had entered so soon. It was extremely bewildering.

He went to his room and to bed; and being young and tired, his brain put out the feverish worries and yielded to sleep.

III

WHEN Berg awoke he tried to make out that it had been a dream, but failed. Then he sent out for all the papers and apprehensively scanned them. Not a word of the crime was to be found. Evidently the body had not been found in time for the morning press. That was some relief—but what would the afternoon papers say? He was fearfully anxious to see.

Mrs. Marvin would no doubt be anxious to find him; but he concluded that he would take pains to keep out of her way until he had seen an account of the murder in the papers.

If he had been guilty of the crime, he assured himself, then of course he would feel differently. But he was innocent. He continued over and over to assure himself of that.

It also cheered him up slightly to feel that as long as he remained in the club she could not possibly find him. She had really been peculiar in not asking who he was and where he was staying, especially when she had so cleverly thought of everything else pertaining to concealing her whereabouts and his.

Berg was at breakfast and really enjoying it more than he had expected to when a boy entered and extended to him the card of a gentleman waiting in the reception lobby of the club.

It read:

FRANKLIN J. ROBERTS
Lieutenant of Detectives
City Police

Berg did not faint. He just slumped into his chair and with the last of his flickering energy made a frantic grab for the cup of hot coffee. Down it went. But it was the last of the breakfast. He simply sat looking at the dishes while his brain bounded about wondering what to do, what to say.

Then he realized that the boy who had brought the card was waiting.

"Tell Mr. — er — I mean Lieutenant Roberts I'll see him when I've finished breakfast."

The boy made off.

"—— all women," said Berg to himself.

He inhaled deeply of a cigaret and tried to think of a plausible lie to convey to the lieutenant.

He had the usual man about town's contempt for the police, particularly the contempt of the usual young man about town who has been into and got out of many scrapes, sometimes with money and sometimes with cunning. Still he was exceedingly uncomfortable at the thought of facing Lieutenant Roberts. He was more than uncomfortable. He was panic-stricken, though he did not show it outwardly. He simply sat and smoked and felt that he was about to be hanged.

"Mrs. Marvin must have tipped the police!"

The thought leaped into his head like a tongue of fire—then died down.

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"Impossible! She did not even know my name," he reasoned; and he softened a little toward her.

Berg dallied at the table as long as he felt the hungriest man's breakfast would warrant, then reluctantly arose, paused to light a fresh cigaret and went to meet Roberts. He did not know exactly what he would tell him, but he was quite sure that he would tell him something that would make the detective feel that Berg was not the man he was after.

A good strong bluff—that ought to send the detective about his business.

But when he saw Lieutenant Roberts he had a new tremor. Roberts was not at all the thick-necked, bull-headed, flat-footed fellow typical of plain-clothes men. He was a lithe young fellow with a clean-cut face and soft voice; and he had the most distressing eyes that Berg had ever seen in a man's head. They were light-gray eyes, mild enough of expression, but steady as two points of burnished steel extended from a vise. The mouth was mobile, thin-lipped and curled pleasantly at the corners when Roberts spoke; but the mouth that seemed ready to yield to pleasantry, or even to humor, was belied by the eyes.

"Mr. Berg Douglas?" Roberts asked, rising as Berg came out.

Berg nervously discarded his cigaret and admitted it, then glanced at his watch and muttered something about an "appointment."

He was not quite sure, for he did not look squarely at the lieutenant's face, but he felt that the man had smiled. It was no time for smiling. Berg wished that he had ducked out the rear of the club and caught a boat for Bermuda, or a train for California. It was too late now. Roberts was saying that he would require but a few minutes, and might they not go some place where they could have a few words alone.

Berg hesitated, then suggested the library. There was seldom any one in it at that time of the morning.

When they had seated themselves in an alcove, and Berg was fidgeting with first his cigaret case, then his watch, adjusting his tie and squirming about as if many things bothered him, Roberts leaned forward, tapped him on the knee, and gaining his full attention for a second asked—

"What about Marvin?"

THAT question took Berg amidships. It crumpled him up. He was young and inexperienced, and even if properly encouraged would have had some trouble in dove-tailing smoothly any kind of an elaborate lie. But he did not have a chance. Not only was there the inherent instinct to tell the truth, but he was innocent. He knew it. He had the innocent man's well-nigh irresistible urge to speak facts as they were—and he did.

He blurted out the whole story rapidly, stumbling over words in his haste to get them out, going back and repeating details, iterating over and over that he was innocent, and nervously pleading with Roberts to believe him.

Roberts sat immobilely listening. Several times he seemed about to speak, but his thin lips drew tight and he remained silent, though he tapped the arm of his chair noiselessly as he sat with up-turned face staring at the ceiling when for the fourth or fifth time Berg was excitedly explaining that he would never look at another woman—never so long as he lived. They were the source of all man's troubles. The woman could not have killed Marvin herself—she was not in the room. But then there was no one else in the room, excepting himself. But he did not do it. He called upon Roberts to find the murderer. He even offered a big reward then and there.

"Don't bring money into this," the lieutenant said crisply; and from the way he said it Berg knew that the lieutenant was not fishing for a larger sum. He was simply not that kind of officer.

Berg apologized humbly.

"You are sure you don't know where this dame put up last night?" the lieutenant asked suspiciously.

"I don't—honest. I was glad to get rid of her."

"What makes you think she doesn't know who you are?"

"She never asked me. Not once. Course I wouldn't have told her—not after that happened."

Roberts smiled. There was no doubt of it this time. Then the smile left, and bending forward with a fatherly hand on Berg's knee he said:

"Mr. Douglas, I rather believe you. I do. From what you have told—though I ought to take you to the station. But you keep it under your hat. No one else is on to

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you. And if you will promise me not to run away, I'll look around a little more, then we will talk it over."

Berg was profuse in thanks.

"Are you sure you don't know where Mrs. Marvin can be found?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"You will have before long," Roberts said enigmatically as he arose to leave.

Berg did not follow the statement with inquiries as to what was meant. He had another question that was simply aching to get itself into words.

"Lieutenant, how on earth did you know it was me? I didn't breathe my name to a soul. I never saw Mrs. Marvin before last night."

"You've seen Marvin though, haven't you?"

Berg reflected, then admitted that he had noticed Marvin once or twice before at the café.

"You drop into that café frequently, don't you?"

Berg admitted it.

"I have a friend that works there and—" Roberts was smiling slightly— "well, frankly Mr. Douglas, I believe she is rather inclined to notice when handsome young men receive notes from attractive lady patrons. You may remember her. She wears a Spanish rig and sings——"

"Say, what's back of Marvin, anyway?" Berg asked eagerly, remembering that Maggie McGuire had thrown a cryptic warning at him as she left. "Has he any enemies?"

"Lots of 'em," Roberts replied. "He was a bad one—that fellow. I believe Miss McGuire told you that. You see, she recognized you. You are fairly well known, Mr. Douglas."

"But if he had enemies," Berg persisted, offering aid to the detective, "then maybe it was some of them that did it. One of the windows may have been open—expert knife-thrower sent it through. You know —one of those queer coincidences. Must have been that. Do you remember if a window was open?"

Roberts answered slowly that he had not really inspected the premises so carefully as that, but said that he would look around with an eye for all details; and as he left he suggested that Berg be sure not to breathe a word of what had taken place to any one.

"Don't let anybody—not even Mrs. Marvin—know that you have seen me. Can you keep it from her?" Roberts asked.

"You bet. And not only that, but I can keep myself from her."

Roberts laughed as he left.

Berg had scarcely finished wondering what the detective had found so humorous when he was called to the telephone.

IV

MRS. MARVIN was on the wire and wanted to know how soon he could come to her. Her voice was very sweet and inviting. At any other time it might have thrilled Berg, but his nerves had been racked. They did not register anything less than a shock, and it was pretty much of a shock to discover the ease with which she had located him.

There was something uncanny about the whole business. He had always rather despised the average intellect, and thought himself in cleverness rather above the average. But here almost before he was out of bed the detective had come upon him, and the detective had scarcely got out of sight before Mrs. Marvin had him located. He wondered whether the two of them were not working together. Perhaps there was no such person as Lieutenant of Detectives Roberts.

Mrs. Marvin insisted that he should come to her at once. She had the best news conceivable—think of the very best and it would be that.

"Isn't he dead?" Berg whispered, eagerly.

"Of course—but no more over the telephone. Come to me at once, won't you, dear?"

He promised—and he went.

From somewhere she had got another gown than that she wore when leaving the house. She had rare taste in gowns. Her slim body was sheathed in dull bronze cloth, fantastically caught up on one shoulder and subtlely conveying the impression that the other was nearly undressed and that the garment was about to slip off and fall down around her feet. It was quite effective. She welcomed Berg with hungry arms and extended lips, kissing him fiercely into a semblance of warmth. Then with his arm about her and both of hers locked about his neck they sat down side by side and she told him the story of her life.

It was the usual history of married beauty in distress—hasty marriage, lack of love,

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lack of faithfulness, jealousy, brutality, long suffering, love at first sight with Berg whose name she had managed to learn, a note surreptitiously written, the tryst, the enraged husband, the death-blow—and freedom.

But she had had one friend in the household, Old Jules, the butler. Old Jules was a shrewd fellow. He had stumbled on to the body of Marvin and thinking that his beloved mistress had at last done what she should have done long ago, he had dragged the body into the cellar, buried it, and cleaned up all signs of the crime. Then he gave out to the other servants that the master and mistress had, as they frequently did, gone abruptly on a trip for a few days. Later on he would give out that they were making a tour of the Orient, dismiss the servants, close up the house—and no one would ever know.

Wasn't that brilliant and loyal of Jules?

Berg had the queer look in his eyes of a man who has seen ghosts as he acknowledged that it was. He was wondering how on earth Roberts had learned of the murder. He forgot that Roberts had not said anything more than: "What about Marvin?" which had been enough to overturn Berg's guilty conscience and cause him to spill the story.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"I was just thinking," Berg said.

He did not need to admit it.

"Of how we could reward Jules?"

"Yes," he agreed. Any straw for a drowning man.

"Poor Jules. Only a few weeks ago he lost every cent of his savings. Invested in war stocks. Dear old fellow, he so wanted enough to retire on. All my property was in Mr. Marvin's name. I can't even buy a postage stamp——"

"This —" he asked curiously, touching her dress.

She laughed, and presented the bill that had come with it.

"I wanted something nice for you."

Berg assured her that that was all right and fine, and that she need not worry.

"I have charge-accounts everywhere. Of course, they really must be settled or the creditors will get inquisitive——"

"I'll attend to that. Leave it to me." Berg had the careless assurance of a man of affairs. "How much will cover it?"

A check-book came from his pocket.

"Oh I don't think it will be over fifteen or twenty thousand," she answered carelessly, arranging a stray hair as she glanced across the room at a low-hung mirror.

"Good heavens!"

It slipped out before he knew. He had heard that women were expensive.

"That is to clear them up—and Gerome's, too. Of course, if his aren't paid it would mean that creditors would get excited, and you know what excited creditors do."

Berg said that he did; but as a matter of fact he did not. He always paid in full upon request. His creditors did not request often. They encouraged him to heap up accounts and pay something from time to time. He was not tight with money, but he did not like the idea of wasting twenty thousand dollars on Marvin's debts if that lieutenant knew that the man was dead.

"And Jules—good Old Jules. We really must do something for him. He could make it terribly unpleasant for us if he was inclined to talk."

"Yes, Jules—let's see——"

"He had saved over ten thousand. He thought he really needed about thirty to retire and——"

"Judas priest!" That slipped out, too.

She looked at him with strange eyes—just a glance, but such a glance. It expressed the wonder whether she were to be disappointed by having this dearly beloved of all men embarrass her and act unseemly by a miserly regard for a few paltry dollars.

But Berg was really thinking of Roberts more than of Jules. He was thinking that maybe at that moment Roberts was poking about in the cellar and investigating newly disturbed earth.

"We owe much to Jules," she explained. "Nothing has been in the papers—you noticed that. Otherwise by this time—you can imagine!"

True enough. But if Roberts found that body, what would be the good of paying Jules thirty thousand; and she seemed to expect that he would pay it. Berg wondered what he would have said or done if he had chanced to be a poor man, as he chanced to be one who could comfortably meet the demands she imposed.

"Jules will be here in a few minutes and then——"

She implied adroitly all that she had left unsaid. Berg was one of those young men

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who would rather lose a hand than be thought a piker. Very weakly, and with no enthusiasm at all, he caught up the remark where she dropped it and said that he could make things right with Jules.

Mrs. Marvin flung herself into his arms and praised him for being such a dear, generous boy.

But Berg wanted to think. He was trying to discover how on earth that detective had got on to a crime that Jules was supposed to have concealed. There was something wrong some place, but Jules had evidently done his best; and the woman—well, he did owe her a lot for the way she had stood by him. It was particularly loyal of her as she thought him the murderer.

WHILE they sat talking—sat very close together with hands interlocked and lips not far apart—a respectful rap came on the door, and when Mrs. Marvin opened it an elderly man, somewhat bowed and humble of manner, with gray side-whiskers and downcast eyes, came into the room.

It was Jules. He was extremely courteous, with the properly retiring and formal manner of an old servant.

"This is Mr. Douglas, Jules."

"Yes, 'am. Yes, 'am. Mr. Douglas, ma'am," he acknowledged, bowing, giving a casual glance at Berg and keeping a respectful ear for madam.

"I have told Mr. Douglas everything."

"Yes, 'am. Very good, ma'am."

"Mr. Douglas thinks that you are too along in years, Jules, to have to continue in service. He was wondering if you could be comfortable the remainder of your life on the income from—say thirty thousand well invested."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am. Indeed. I thank you, sir. It is most generous. Oh, ma'am —" but words of gratitude failed him.

He trembled perceptibly, his voice shook, his hand was unsteady as he removed a kerchief and wiped his eyes.

Berg was greatly moved by the old man's emotion. He was ashamed of himself for having begrudged the money to such a loyal and pathetic character.

"It's all right, Jules. It is all right. I wish that I, too, could do something for you. But you know how the matter stands. Every cent of my money was put under Mr. Marvin's name. He would have it so."

"Oh, m'am, what you have suffered. I am sure that you will be happy now, m'am," and he gave a respectful, complimentary glance at Berg, who, as if reminded of his duty at once wrote out the check for thirty thousand dollars.

He gave it to Mrs. Marvin who pressed it into the old man's trembling hand.

"Oh, thank you, thank you," he repeated first to her and then to Berg, repeated over and over with emotion almost choking his words. "Thank you. Thank you. I am only a poor old man who has only tried to be faithful. Faithful. Thank you. Thank you. I am sure you will be happy now, ma'am. I am sure you will."

Again the quick, complimentary glance was cast to Berg.

Repeating "thank you," and deprecating his own deserts, asserting his gratitude over and over, Jules with evident timidity extended a parting and grateful hand to Berg, and then to Mrs. Marvin.

Both were silent as they watched him slowly turn to the door and pass out.

The door closed. Mrs. Marvin turned to Berg with extended hands and radiant, smiling face—then came the sound of scuffling just outside the door, a flurry of angry voices, a quick shout, a voice—unmistakably that of Jules—raised in fury.

Mrs. Marvin and Berg listened motionless for the space of seconds, then both as by one impulse sprang toward the door. But before they could reach it, the door was thrown open and Jules was thrown into the room, while Detective Roberts—behind whose back stood two husky plain-clothes men—inquiringly looked about the room.

"Good morning," said the lieutenant pleasantly, calmly, addressing Mrs. Marvin, at the same time tossing to the floor two little fuzzy strips that he had held in his hand.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" Mrs. Marvin demanded in haughty anger, drawing herself erect and glaring at the detective.

"That?" Lieutenant Roberts inquiringly indicated the fuzzy strips on the floor. "Oh, I just pulled the side-whiskers off your pal. Thought I recognized him. Some make-up. I wasn't sure till I had removed the whiskers."

All eyes turned toward Jules. He had

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lost his humble manner and stood erect, boiling with wrath, but helpless and knowing it.

Berg stared incredulously. He looked from the face of Jules to the whiskers on the floor and back again. There was something about that face—something—something. Then in a burst of amazement he cried—

"My heavens, can it be——"

He stopped. He could not bring himself to say it. It was inconceivable.

But Lieutenant Roberts finished the remark for him.

"Yes, Mr. Douglas. That's just who it is. Marvin himself."

Then Mrs. Marvin leaped forward with hands outstretched and fingers bent like claws, and though the two plain-clothes men put their arms about her in anything but a tender fashion, she struggled fiercely to scratch Roberts' eyes out.

"Yes," Roberts went on easily, "Mr. Douglas, you were caught in a variation of the old badger game. I've had my eye on these Marvins for some time. When I heard that she had slipped you a note in the café, I suspected that you were being led into a trap and thought I'd call around and warn you. I didn't expect such quick action."

"But the dagger—I saw it sticking in his breast!"

"Oh, no. No. You just saw the handle of a dagger fitted on to a suction hilt. A little red ink helped the illusion. Marvin there used to be a ham actor. He thought he was too good for the stage. And you see, the way that room was lighted—the little dim globe on one side and the full glare through the doorway on the other—fixed it so he could have that dagger-handle on his chest all of the time without your seeing it until he groaned and fell to the floor. His wife here is a good-looker and she rings in the suckers. Marvin looked you up after the first time he saw you in the restaurant. You were a fat one and they laid for you."

"Never again, never again," said Berg soberly, thinking of the flirtation by which he had been easily caught. Then he demanded indignantly: "Why didn't you tell me all that this morning—let me worry——"

"We needed evidence," the lieutenant replied imperturbably, drawing from his pocket the check Berg had but a few minutes before handed to Jules. "And —well—frankly, Mr. Douglas, you needed the experience."

OLD SAILING-SHIPS

BY RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

THEY were not junk, but waiting
Like birds with wings that are broken
For time to heal and a token
Of Heaven's fating.

And now once more the sea is white with their sails,
Clipper and lugger, schooner and bark and brig.
What if the paint is gone from their sides and rails,
Stanch are their keels and eager and trim their rig!
And their fine old figureheads smack of the good old days
When Yankee masters were owners of Yankee ways,
And rounded with Yankee crews the Cape and the Horn
On ships that were named after damsels Yankee-born.

They were not junk, but waiting
Like birds with wings that are broken
For time to heal and a token
Of Heaven's rating.

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THE WINGED AVENGER

by Charles Beadle

Author of "The Double Scoop," "The Cave," etc.

UPON a grass mat in a square tent was a local chief, Yama Yama, a lusty stout man of middle age, clad in the white robes, a trifle discolored, of the Baganda, with a tuft of woolly beard on his chin which he scratched in a meditative manner. Beside him, reclined a younger chief, Matalisi, muscular, with cunning eyes in a sullen face. Squatting 'round the walls were a number of natives; some in dirty robes and others in greasy loin-cloths.

Near to the door sat a copper-skinned man in white whose head lolled listlessly so that his white pill-box cap and jowl, decorated with isolated patches of scrubby moss, were in a shaft of sunlight. A darker-hued, small man near to him, with more negroid features, wore a black bead rosary from which was suspended a small crucifix. Another man was in the far corner, sprawled upon his elbow, asleep or dozing, his shaven skull peeping beneath a ragged green turban.

The hot afternoon sun threw patchwork shadows of the unthatched roof half-way down the wall; through the door the light leaped up from the sandy clearing between the huts. A native woman, her fly-blown eyed child wrapped on her back in a greasy blanket, diligently ground corn between rough, flat stones. Diminutive chickens, fatigued by the heat, rested in the shade beside her, their heads drooping, beaks open.

The typical somnolent state of the native was disturbed by the shuffle of feet. The chief, Yama Yama, raised his head ponderously. A shadow darkened the threshold. A peasant entered and stood blinking his eyes in the gloom of the hut. He saluted the two chiefs who mumbled a response lazily.

"What is the news?" demanded Matalisi.

"Good," said the peasant squatting on his haunches before him. "Bwana Tit'way sends a message that Yama Yama shall visit the Boma to make a big *shauri* with the Bwana Kubwa Binky, and that Matalisi shall make ready for the coming of the Bwana Kubwa at the rest-house of Kibwezi. This is the message of the Bwana Tit'way."

Yama Yama and Matalisi grunted.

"Bwana Tit'way," continued the messenger in a gossipy tone, "hath but returned from Ulayi (Europe) and hath brought a white wife with him."

Curiosity rippled the audience like a puff of wind upon a lake.

"What is she like?" demanded Matalisi, sitting up.

"Long hair, the color of a stormy sunset, after the manner of white women; and eyes like the midday sky."

Matalisi clucked approval and inquired:

"And is she fat like the wife of the Bwana Kubwa?"

"Nay; neither is she skinny like the women of the missionaries, but plump like a partridge at harvest time."

"*E-eh!*" chorused the crowd.

A yellow-faced Baganda whispered to his neighbor; they both laughed, showing strong white teeth beneath the dull blubber lips.

"Where are they now?" inquired Maliko of the spotless robes from the doorway.

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"They passed by the village of Luba a moon since. Heard ye not? Now they dwell at the Boma. The Bwana Binky will stay with them; but they say that he will return to Jinja upon the new moon."

"For what cometh he?" demanded Yama Yama.

"Nay, how should I know?"

"Perhaps he bringeth more of the sickness?" suggested a mild voice.

"Nay, nay; what white man should have it?" protested a peasant.

"True," said another. "But it is their gift, this curse of the white man!"

"So say the people of the west; but it doth not eat us up," said Yama Yama. "That," he added with a deep-chested laugh, "is only for the dogs of the white men, the Waganda!"

"True, the white man brought it," affirmed a Baganda. "But it is at thy gates, Oh, Yama, Yama. Think ye that they will let ye escape?"

"Nay," exclaimed Musisi, bending forward excitedly so that his crucifix glittered in the sunlight. "Nay, the whites have not brought it, for my Katoliki father say that it is the tsetse fly which giveth the Sleeping Death."

"*Tssah!*" interrupted Mohammed who wore the turban. "Thy father is a liar and a son of Satan! Have not the flies been long ere the white man was seen among us? But maybe it is a curse of Allah on ye unbelievers!"

"But," chimed in another man, "hath not a white been stricken by the Sleeping Death? Would a man drink of his own poison?"

"*Tch!* That is as naught! For all white men are mad being stricken by Allah!" Mohammed grinned vastly and scratched his shaven poll, pushing his turban awry. "Yillah, it is true!" he added. "Hath not the Prophet so said?"

"The Prophet was ever a liar!" retorted Musisi, hitting back for the insult to his father.

"Nay, nay, thou Katoliki pig!" screamed Mohammed and poured forth a torrent of abusive epithets.

"'Tis true! The Prophet is a liar!" shouted Maliko in the pill-box cap.

FOR a while the two allies bore down on the son of Mohammed a cataract of invective until the latter cunningly sought to divide the partnership.

"You—you pig of a Katoliki!" he screamed. "What art thou? Does not thy brother—" pointing an accusing finger at Maliko— "say that thou and thy prophets are liars too!"

"*E-eh! E-eh!*" cried Musisi, turning upon Maliko recollecting past grievances. "You filthy Protestanti! You——"

"What have you to say, you son of a cannibal, you dog?" retorted Maliko, streaming obscene execration.

While Mohammed exhausted his vocabulary, Yama Yama and his pagan colleagues sat mute. At length in a pause for breath, a voice remarked—

"All your gods are liars!"

Whereupon the three champions of religion fell upon the heathen in general.

"*Tss-ah!*" commented Yama Yama when opportunity offered, "You are all cowards! You are all afraid of the white man!"

"Nay, nay!" screamed Mohammed, foremost in indignant denial. "We Mohammedans have ever beaten the white men who dared to come within our country. Have we not beaten them in the Sudan? Killed them and taken their women? Wait! Wait! We men will drive them out of the land as it is written in the Koran. Mohammed is with us!"

"Liar!" yelled Maliko. "Are not we the chosen of Isa Masiya, hath not the book said that we are the chosen people who shall reconquer the earth? The Omusumesa tell us so. It is true!"

"Nay, nay!" protested Musisi, the crucifix swinging violently as he gesticulated. "We—we are the chosen of the Great Spirit. You will all go to hell—that is true. We are the chosen people; all other people——"

"*E-eh!*" sneered Mohammed, "you are afraid of the white man! You who are women; not men. No man hath but one wife. A man should have many wives. Is not that sure, Oh, Yama Yama?"

"Aye," assented Yama Yama grinning; "a man should have many wives indeed. But ye are all liars and——"

"Liars! Liars!" chorused the pagans.

"Mohammed was no liar and that I will prove!" screamed Mohammed. "No white man ever struck me. They are afraid of us —else why do they not conquer us? They——"

"*Clk!*" clucked Matalisi sneeringly. "Thy crowing is like a cockerel upon a dung

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heap who flieth at the approach of a woman!"

"Liar!" screeched Maliko. "Of no white man am I frightened! I would kill a white man as my women kill a chicken! I——"

"*Tss-ah!*" retorted Matalisi scornfully, "another cockerel! I would give ten head of fat cattle to have a white man killed. But ye are all cowards! *Tss-ah!*"

"Good! Good!" acclaimed the crowd. "Is not the white man the harbinger of sickness and the Sleeping Death? Down with them!"

"*E-eh!*" exclaimed Yama Yama. "These are coward curs! I would add fifty head, but—*tch*—cowards all! Now, I myself——"

"Liar!" shouted Maliko, springing to his feet. "What is a white man? I will kill thy white man for thee since thou art afraid! The cattle are mine! We are the chosen——"

"*Tss-ah,*" squealed Mohammed, hoarse with excitement, "It is I who will——"

He ceased abruptly. Outside sounded the *clipclop* of boots. Mohammed and Maliko sank down silently as a white man's voice called— .

"*E-eh!* Yama Yama!"

Yama Yama scowled and did not move. A sharp exclamation of annoyance preceded the appearance of a white man in khaki and a felt hat in the doorway.

"*Jambo, Bwana!*" greeted Yama Yama amiably, and asked politely, "*Habari gani?*"

"*Jema!*" answered the white, peering 'round the group. "Which is Yama Yama?"

"*Mimi, Bwana!*"

"*Njoo!* (come here,)" peremptorily, turning away.

As he shambled to his feet an ingratiating smile crossed Yama Yama's thick lips which turned to a sulky curve when the white had disappeared.

"*Njoo! Sikia?* (d'you hear?)" came the voice again, sharply.

"Pig of an unbeliever!" said Mohammed *sotto voce.*

"Son of a —" muttered Maliko.

"Who is he?" whispered Matalisi.

"*Bwana* Fedd'n," returned Maliko.

"Kill him! Allah hath sent him!" urged Mohammed.

"Aye, I will kill him," murmured Maliko.

"Aye, a chance to win the cattle," sneered some one.

"Wait till he is out of the village," commanded Matalisi nervously.

"Aye," whispered Maliko fiercely, "he may live till then!"

II

THE red-blue rays of the afternoon sun tinted the glaucous waters of a bay with violet and silver. The mists settled slowly 'round the small reed-encircled islands. The whisper of the perennial day breeze murmured in the tree-tops and gently flecked the placid surface of the lake. On a beach beneath a low plateau on which stood a grass-thatched bungalow the waters idly sucked in and about the dense reed-girt shore, lapping lazily at the bottom of two large native canoes drawn up within the thatched awning of the primitive landing-stage. The mosquitoes began to emerge in the world of flies, lizards, and birds.

Now and again a ubiquitous tsetse-fly hovered about the native hoes, choppers, and cooking-pots lying deserted by a dilapidated hut near to the landing-stage. The harmonious voice of nature was unbroken by any human note; everywhere the birds, beasts and insects held carnival. A lizard with a flash of scarlet and green disappeared upon an exploring expedition into a blackened cooking-pot. A large fat rat busily fed on sodden grains of corn in the shadow of the hut.

From the house, hidden from the beach by the dense timber on the short flat and the steep escarpment, the customary blue curl of smoke was absent; the only sign of human life was a distant wisp of smoke away over a far headland, hazy and intermittent in the sunlight. Up on the plateau behind the bungalow the group of native huts appeared eloquent of desertion. Half a dozen hens scratched and clucked about the refuse heaps; the rooster in charge crowed occasionally in a half-hearted manner.

The doors and windows of the bungalow were closed. Under the eaves of the veranda the hornets had built numerous hanging nests. The whole place seemed under a spell.

Slowly the sun sank in molten haze. About six o'clock appeared a sign of human life—a fumbling of the latch within the bungalow, a subdued yelping as the door

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opened. Three terriers rushed out; two with joyous, shrill barks, the other more soberly, preceding a white man who came yawning and stretching on to the veranda. A fourth terrier crept after them, his coat staring, eyes lackluster and feeble. He sat down at Natts' feet as if exhausted with that small exertion.

The man continued to rub his head and to stare at the silent kitchen and native quarters. A dog brushed his leg with a warm nose, as if demanding attention. Natts stroked him, looking down sadly.

"Poor beast," he said, "Poor beast."

As he continued to pat and stroke the beast the two joyous ones noisily demanded a share of attention.

"No, no," Natts admonished. "You've no call—yet. Poor beast," he continued, caressing the first dog; "me and you—poor beast—and poor Tinker!"

He stood up and pinched his throat, muttering—

"There might be—there might be!"

He went back into the bungalow from whence came the sound of the clink of bottles. Presently he emerged holding up a whisky-bottle and emptied a full half-tumbler of spirit into a dirty glass standing upon the table. But as he snatched at the whisky the bottle slipped from his nervous fingers. The impact startled him; he stared stupidly as it rolled. Distracted by the trivial accident he seized upon the empty bottle and held it up against the light again, turning it at angles and upside down.

Then oblivious of the whisky upon the table he broke into a torrent of language and flung the empty bottle at the group of fowls. The rooster leaped into the air with a squeak and a flutter of wings as the missile flew underneath him, and, with his shrill-clucking wives, fled to safety.

The man hurried down to the cook-house, screaming hoarsely for his head man and the cook alternately. The idea of eating had occurred to him. Usually a very placid man, of late Natts had been subject to sudden fits of craving for wild excitement, appeased by flying into an ungovernable rage; then afterward came lassitude and indifference. He had not been down to the scene of work—tree-felling—for some weeks. It became too much trouble to move from the bungalow, except to rush around the immediate neighborhood in mad anger.

As he approached the kitchen in the violet glow he appeared a stooping, shuffling figure of a very old man; the thin bloodless lips gibbered obscene oaths, the small eyes were bloodshot and glassy. The two terriers gambolled around, gleefully chasing chickens as he kicked open the door made of packing-cases knocked together. A cloud of flies emerged as he stumbled into the gloom, cursing and calling on the cook by name. Receiving no answer he shuffled out again and made for the head man's hut, the first of the line. A whine came from within as he battered the rickety door open. A roynish native dog, a rheumy-eyed skeleton, crept out. He kicked at it savagely, cursing afresh as he missed it.

Natts disappeared into the gloom, still frothing curses, leaving the cur to exchange dismal confidences with the two lively terriers. For a while Natts stood blinking in the gloom, spluttering maledictions and commands. As his eyes focused to the shadows he gradually became aware of a figure upon a heap of ragged blankets in a corner of the hut. He shambled over and roughly pulled it by the shoulder.

The covering blanket fell away, revealing the brown withered breasts of a woman. She grunted. Natts swore violently and shook her. The eyes opened slowly, gazed at him without intelligence, and closed in sleep again. Half a dozen times Natts shook and shouted to her, inquiring for her man; but he could not elicit any answer save a tired groan and prodigious sighs.

AT LENGTH he stumbled out of the hut, his passion rapidly abating. In turn he visited several huts, but only found the corpse of a young child, emaciated.

Natts passed from the charnel-house with dragging steps, followed by the two dogs. Inside he stopped and swayed, gazing over the glass of whisky into the shadows of the darkening room.

"Gimme a drink!" he whispered hoarsely, "Christ, gimme a ——"

He ceased and pawed at his scrubby chin perplexedly; blinked; and forgetting what he desired, continued on into the room, stumbling over a quantity of empty bottles as he collapsed upon the camp-bed. The dogs, after lapping thirstily of dirty soapsuds in an iron basin in the corner, sniffed inquiringly once more at Tinker, a lethargic skeleton already curled up amid a litter of

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whisky-bottles, and leaped upon the bed beside their master.

The twilight gave up the violet ghost of day for the silver-green spirit of the moon. Mosquitoes entering through the torn screens buzzed and glutted. A nightbird shrieked dismally in the distance. Natts slept on; his head falling sideways, half-throttled the troubled breathing. Saliva trickled from the nerveless lips upon the dirty blanket.

At about four o'clock as the moon dipped across the lake peering inquisitively through the frayed calico windows, came stealthy movement—two faces appeared; one greeny-brown in the moonlight, fringed with woolly patches; the other blacker and tighter, wearing a ragged turban on a polished skull. In the hands of each man was a broad-bladed stabbing-spear.

They paused to listen apprehensively and glanced at one another. The eyes were bloodshot, the thick lips twitched convulsively. Slowly Mohammed pushed open the door. The shaft of moonlight revealed the glass of whisky upon the table. A yellow palm on a skinny wrist grabbed it greedily. Samwili gasped with satisfaction as the liquor warmed his throat; his eyes glinted: but Mohammed with a grunt of disgust clutched his arm. The glass slipped. Came another clash from the inner room, a moan, a tinkle of bottles and the whimper of dogs. Samwili bolted. Mohammed paused, trembling, whites of eyes rolling.

The shuffle of limbs being dragged along the ground, heavy breathing, the clink of bottles cannoning, preceded the bleary eyes of Natts in the bedroom doorway. From the veranda Samwili saw Natts upon his hands and knees staring vacantly, grotesque, like a red-haired baboon; saw between the shoulder blades a rent in the khaki jacket upon which descended a silver streak of light.

Samwili fled, conscious of Mohammed at his heels and the shrill barking of dogs as they sped through the forest. But when they had rounded the small escarpment which lay at the back of the bungalow, and were near to the village of Avimi, they stopped to listen on the fringe of the plantation.

The green of the moon was deepening to sapphire: stars twinkled; and in the east was the pallor of dawn. Only the insectial anthem of the forest throbbed and a distant village dog yapped feebly.

"*Ough!*" grunted Mohammed with satisfaction. "T'was good, the blow! My spear hit deep!"

"*Eeh!*" panted Samwili, "but if they should know!"

"Coward!" sneered Mohammed. "Thou knowest well that all have fled the Sleeping Death save the white man and his dogs."

"*Eh!*" murmured Samwili uncomfortably, "but the white man knoweth all things. And mayhap," he added dismally, "the White Man's Curse hath bitten us as well."

"Thrice coward!" taunted Mohammed. "Thou didst flee at a shadow and now thou art afraid of the sickness as are all Protestanti and Katoliki! It is I who should have the cattle."

"But we agreed," gasped Samwili forgetting insults, "that——"

"*Tchh!* What hast thou done, cur, save to run? *Eh!*" as a cock crew, "listen to the voice of the white man's ghost calling!"

As Mohammed stood tense in the grip of a local superstition, Samwili sprang sideways and with all his force, drove his spear through the left side of his accomplice. Mohammed grunted, sank to his knees and toppled over. Samwili stood with his spear in poise until the convulsive twitching of Mohammed was stilled. Then leaning upon the spear in the pale light he grinned and cursed obscenely in the native manner, adding—

"The cattle now are mine, Oh, son of many fools!"

The crowing of another cock startled him. He glanced around swiftly; and seizing the body dragged it a dozen yards to an ant-bear hole into which he thrust it deep; ran back for the spear which he broke in half and rammed it beside the victim. In one night the jackals would devour all save the bones and the spear.

Although the disposal of the body did not take long, the light had grown. Natives rise early. Coming through the plantation Samwili saw a peasant with a hoe in his hand. Into a heap of refuse piled for burning Samwili crawled and waited until the man had passed; then rising he scuttled into the densest portion of the plantation.

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III

GROUPED along the veranda of a thatched house in the compound of Fort Mbali was a throng of natives odoriferous in the heat. At the far end of the room, seated at a table littered with papers, a volume of the Indian Penal Code, other law tomes and reference books, sat a parchment-faced white man with a dull yellow mustache; at a smaller deal table to his right crouched the Goanese clerk opposite to whom stood a native prisoner in a very self-conscious manner between two police guards in khaki with red facings, bursting out in wild contradiction of the evidence of a nude Kavirondo chief who committed perjury every five minutes under the cross-examination of the court interpreter, posing hand upon hip by the table of authority.

A bubbling commotion without the door preceded the appearance of Yama Yama and Matalisi. Ordering the interpreter to stand down, Titheway had the court cleared in favor of a more pressing case. Amid the shuffling and objurgation Titheway consulted some papers and the Goanese, chewing the end of his pen, watched the process with the air of an inquisitive monkey. The dignity of Matalisi and the weight of Yama Yama had to be supported by two chairs; their attendants were compelled to do honor to the majesty of the court by perching uncomfortably on forms along the wall.

Titheway opened the case by informing the two chiefs that they had been summoned to give information regarding the murder of *Bwana* Natts, a white trader, which had occurred in their joint district; he reminded them that if the guilt of the culprit was in any way concealed, the retribution of the *Serkali*—Government—would be swift and terrible; then addressing Yama Yama he demanded to know what he had to say.

Yama Yama heaved to his feet at a jerk on the elbow from the police sergeant and replied in an indifferent tone that he knew nothing about the matter.

"Thou sayest," repeated Titheway, watching him closely, "that thou knowest nothing whatever about this murder of a white man which occurred within a short distance of thy village?"

Yama Yama blinked drowsily and admitted that he had heard of it.

"When?"

"I do not know, *Bwana*."

"What didst thou hear?"

Yama Yama's yellow eyes regarded the white man aggrievedly. The big mouth convulsed gradually and the words came with effort, wearily.

"I don't know, *Bwana*."

"Who told thee?"

"I don't know, *Bwana*."

The creases in the fat face registered utter boredom. Titheway turned to the other chief. Matalisi's small eyes brightened as he rose, although the features remained inscrutably sulky.

"*Indio, Bwana*. I heard of this matter on the morrow after, which is now five days ago."

"What didst thou hear?"

"They came to me and awoke me, saying that the *Bwana* Natts had been found lying upon the floor of his house with a wound from a spear in the back. *Indio*. After they had told me I sent runners to ask who had done this thing of evil, for I was afraid. And even I sent a messenger to you, *Bwana*, to report and ask what I should do. *Indio*."

"Thinkest thou that this deed was committed by thy people?"

"Nay, *Bwana*. My people are loyal to the *Serkali*. But there are many strangers in Busoga. This thing hath been done by a *shenzie*. *Indio*. My people have not done this thing. Even have I offered fifty head of cattle of the finest to him who finds the murderer. *Indio*.

Matalisi spoke with a stoppered eagerness as if striving to convince, but without a line of expression flecking the sullen indifference of his features; his bright eyes never flinched before the persistent gaze of the white man.

"Thou knowest nothing else, thou or thy people?"

"Nay, *Bwana*. Nothing. My people are liars, but they are good people. *Indio*."

"Where wast thou on the night that the murder was committed?"

"I was at the village of Yama Yama."

The words came as indifferently as ever. He looked at Yama Yama whose own indifference was not disturbed.

"Is that so, Yama Yama?"

"*Indio, Bwana*," agreed Yama Yama amiably.

"Then—" sharply—"how is it that thou knowest nothing about the matter?"

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"I do not know, *Bwana*."

"But thou must know. Wast thou not there when Matalisi was told?"

"*Indio, Bwana.* But the *Bwana* knows all that the messenger told to Matalisi, for hath he not told the *Bwana?* What else should I know?"

"Why didst thou say that thou didst know nothing about the matter?"

"Would not Matalisi tell the *Bwana?* Why should we both say the same thing?"

The fat creases were twisted into slight curves as one growing peevish at silly questions.

"Hast thou held a *shauri* to ask thy people, as thou wast bidden to?"

"*Indio, Bwana.*"

"And what did they say?"

"That the white man is powerful and knows all things. What should they say?"

Titheway pondered, staring at the flabby face and blank eyes interrogatively.

"And thou, Matalisi—" suddenly pointing a finger—"hast thou held a *shauri?*"

"*Indio, Bwana.* And my people have sworn to hunt out the stranger who has done this evil thing for they fear the White Man's Curse."

"The White Man's Curse? What is that?"

"The Sleeping Sickness, *Bwana,*" interposed the police sergeant, "which these savages call the White Man's Curse."

"Oh. But—" to Matalisi—"the white men have not brought this sickness. This sickness comes from the west and is given by the bite of the fly which ye call the tsetse. If ye live not where the fly is then will there be no sickness. Know ye not that?"

"*Indio, Bwana,*" answered Matalisi, tonelessly.

Titheway stared at him for a moment and making an irritable, hopeless gesture with his pen, turned to Yama Yama.

"Is it true that there are many flies by the lake shore near to thy village, Yama Yama?"

Yama Yama gazed blankly at the white man as if he had never seen him before. Then after a pause—

"Is what true, *Bwana*?"

TITHEWAY glanced at him sharply. Then rising he went 'round the table and bidding the man be still, lifted his eyelids and felt the swollen glands of the neck. With a depressed underlip he returned to his seat without comment.

"Why hast thou not reported that the sickness was eating up thy people?"

"I do not know, *Bwana.* What is the use?"

"Thou hast disobeyed my orders, if thou wilt not obey, trouble will come to thee."

"*Indio, Bwana,*" cheerfully.

"H'm. Thou, Matalisi, where didst thou hold thy *shauri?*"

"At the village of Yama Yama."

"Why not at thine own village?"

"*Bwana,* I was at the village of Yama Yama buying a new wife. I sent for my people. It is nearer to the place of the murder, *Indio.*"

Titheway sighed and pinched his chin. Then very swiftly—

"Was a man called Maliko staying at the village of Yama Yama?"

"I do not know a man called Maliko, *Bwana.*"

Titheway called sharply—

"Maliko!"

The police sergeant moved importantly and gave a guttural order which preceded the green-gray face of Maliko in the doorway of the courtroom.

"Matalisi, dost thou know this man?"

"I do not know him, *Bwana,*" replied Matalisi without deigning to turn his head.

"This man was seen in the plantation near to Avimi's village in the early morning about the time of the murder and was seen by the askaris at the village of Yama Yama with thee."

"There are many strangers who pass through the village of Yama Yama."

Titheway gestured. Matalisi sat down, glancing at Yama Yama who was stolidly regarding the walls. The native sergeant jerking Maliko by the elbow, pushed him before the witness chair. Titheway regarded the flat face beneath the jaunty white cap with a tinge of disfavor.

"Thou art Samwili Maliko?"

"Yezzir."

"Swear then to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

With a movement of contempt the heathen sergeant thrust forward a greasy Bible upon which the rubber lips implanted a resounding smack.

"Of what people art thou?"

"Balegga from Kavalla."

"What is thy work?"

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"I servant for Mistaire Blackber."

"Speak Kiswahili!" sharply. "What wast thou doing at the village of Yama Yama on the evening before the murder?"

"I was buying food for my master, *Bwana*."

"Didst thou speak with Matalisi?"

"*Indio, Bwana!*" after a pause.

"Of what was the talk?"

Again Maliko hesitated, shooting a glance at Matalisi and Yama Yama.

"About the crops. And how glad we were that you, *Bwana*, had come back from Ulayi."

"H'm. Nothing else? Thou art sure?"

"*Indio, Bwana.* But also I tried to do as my master hath taught me, to convert these savages to Isa Masiya. *Indio, Bwana.*"

"Didst thou speak of the coming of *Bwana* B'inky?"

"*Indio, Bwana.* We wondered at his coming and were afraid."

"Who was afraid?"

"These savages."

"Of what?"

"I do not know, *Bwana.* The Sleeping Death."

"Do the people talk much of the Sleeping Death?"

"*Indio, Bwana*, for they are afraid."

"H'm. Where didst thou sleep on the night of the murder?"

"In the tent of my master."

"Thou art sure?"

"*Indio, Bwana.*"

Maliko licked his lips and strove to steady his eyes.

"Why, dost thou think, was the *Bwana* murdered?"

"Who can say what these savages will do? They are bad men who have not the light of——"

"That will do. Thou hast heard the people talk?"

"*Indio, Bwana.*"

"What?"

Maliko looked to the right and to the left; he said after an effort, glibly—

"They say that the white man brought the Sleeping Death."

"Who said that?"

"The people."

"What people?" sharply. "Who said it? Thou?"

"Nay, *Bwana.* The people, *Bwana.* They are ignorant and do not know."

"Tell me exactly who said that?"

"Mohammed."

"Who is Mohammed?"

Maliko squinted and hesitated.

"A Baganda, *Bwana*, a follower of the false prophet, Muhamadi."

"Where is Mohammed?"

"I do not know, *Bwana.*"

Maliko licked his lips and stared insolently.

"When didst thou last see him?"

"At the village of Yama Yama."

"When?"

"When I talked with him."

"On the afternoon before the murder?"

"*Indio, Bwana.*"

"Thou hast not seen him since?"

"I have not seen him since."

"H'm. What did he say?"

"I do not know, *Bwana.* He said that the Sleeping Death was the curse of Allah which the white men had brought down upon the people, and that if the white men were all killed the sickness would go. He is a bad man, *Bwana.*"

"To whom did he say that?"

"To me, *Bwana.*"

"To any one else?"

"Nay, *Bwana.* We were quarreling because I was telling him that the prophet was a liar, *Indio, Bwana.*"

"Oh. There was no one else present? Thou art sure?"

"*Indio, Bwana.* No one else."

"Where did he go?"

"I do not know, *Bwana.* I went back to my camp for it was the hour of prayer."

"When and where didst thou hear of the murder?"

"In the morning. My master told me when I was preparing our lunch. *Indio.*"

"That will do."

Maliko retired backward, fell over a form and was thrust outside among the greasy, immobile throng.

"Musisi!"

MUSISI was propelled into the room and led to the witness chair, his eyes shuttling between the white man and the chiefs. While Titheway gravely regarded him he was sworn as a Catholic on the greasy Bible and stated that he was a Basoga of the tribe of Yama Yama.

"Is it true," demanded Titheway, "that thou didst see the man, Maliko, in the fields

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near Avimi's village at the dawn on the morning of the murder?"

Again Musisi's eyes shuttled between the chiefs.

"Answer!"

"*Indio, Bwana,* I did."

"Thou art sure?"

"No, *Bwana.*"

"Thou didst not see him?"

"No, *Bwana.*"

"Why didst thou say that thou hadst?"

"I don't know, *Bwana.*"

Musisi looked pleadingly at Yama Yama.

"But thou didst see a man?"

"*Indio, Bwana,*" eagerly.

"Thou didst think that that man was Maliko?"

"*Indio, Bwana, kweli!* (Truly)."

"H'm. Didst thou speak to him?"

"Nay, *Bwana.*"

"Why not?"

"When I looked again he was gone."

The rest of Titheway's examination was perfunctory; for he knew that as Musisi was a subject of Yama Yama no incriminating evidence was likely to be trapped from him. Musisi soon proved that he was apparently blind as well as stone deaf; for beyond the one reluctant admission, he could not be persuaded to admit that he had either seen or heard of Mohammed. No, he had not seen *Bwana* Fedd'a; he had heard in the fields that a white man had passed through the village.

In turn other members of the village of Yama Yama who had been identified by the police as having been present on the afternoon preceding the murder were called and proved as stubbornly ignorant of anything save the mere passing of the white man. Toward the luncheon hour a scuffling heralded the entrance of a short pallid white man in a huge pith helmet.

"Good morning, Mr. Blackber," greeted Titheway gravely, stopping the flow of stolid denials. "I'm sorry to have brought you so far, but we shan't require you for more than a few minutes."

"Thank you, Mr. Titheway," returned Blackber, speaking in a tired, toneless voice. "But I must hasten to express my sincere grief at the dastardly murder of the worthy Mr. Natts. I assure you——"

"Yes, yes. But forgive me—will you be seated? Thank you. Now practically all that the Court requires is that you identify this man, who, according to evidence, was seen near Avimi's which is, as you know, near to the bungalow of the late Mr. Natts, before dawn on the night of the murder."

Blackber wiped his dank yellow hair and glanced around the court.

"Of course if I can be of any service in aiding the cause of Just——"

And catching sight of Maliko entering—

"Oh, good morning, my son!"

"Good morning, sah," returned Maliko grinning feebly.

"Oh, so you do recognize this man?" commented Titheway. "Would you——"

"But, Mr. Titheway, you can not mean that this man has been accused of this dastardly wicked crime? He——"

"He is not yet accused of anything, Mr. Blackber. What we wish to know is whether he is employed by you and since when?"

"Yes, of course he is. Samwili Maliko is one of my most worthy disciples. He was converted by me four years ago and has been in my employ ever since. He——"

"Forgive me! Will you tell the Court whether this man slept in your tent on the night of the murder?"

"Yes, he undoubtedly did so," said Blackber with some warmth. "I assure you——"

"You can swear on oath to that?"

"Certainly. I can swear to it. He went in the afternoon to buy food and returned for evening prayers. He slept in my tent and prepared our morning coffee. I assure you that there must be some dreadful mistake. He——"

"How far is your camp from Avimi's village?"

"Oh, fully an hour. But I assure you that this man's character——"

"You must forgive me, Mr. Blackber, but that is all that this Court requires. If you will be so kind as to go to the bungalow I will join you for lunch in a few minutes."

Blackber rose, gravely troubled, but he smiled across at his favorite as if to give encouragement. When Titheway had had the court cleared he tapped the desk with his pen and stared with gloomy eyes at the wall map.

IV

AGAIN on a day Matalisi sat with Yama Yama in the guest-house of the latter's village. The eyes of Yama Yama were sunken in the sockets; the vastness of his paunch was drawn and

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wasted. A few yards away sprawled three children of about three years old silently gazing at the elders with a half-curious, half-indifferent expression. Two pairs of eyes were hollow and heavy-lidded; their owners' frames were grotesque skeletons—grotesque by reason of the distended stomachs of native children in contrast with the ribs and bones staring through their hanging covers.

The mother of one, with pendulous withered breasts, slept in the doorway of an adjacent hut, the stone grain-mortar lying idle in front of her. The sun blazed overhead; the flies buzzed around the children's eyes with impunity whilst Matalisi talked volubly to Yama Yama who, seemingly bored to death, nodded sleepily between yawns.

The accomplishment of the murder had awakened in Matalisi an appalling fear of the white man's vengeance; the idea of the Government police swooping upon him and arresting them all, haunted him: and the possibility of retribution brought out the latent superstitious belief in the miraculous power of the whites, sharpened by the dread that either Mohammed or Maliko had betrayed him and Yama Yama.

As yet neither knew exactly what had happened, although Matalisi suspected the truth. Mohammed had disappeared; Maliko had been detained by the *Serkali*. Even if they had not yet betrayed the two chiefs Matalisi knew, that as they were not his own people, they might turn upon him immediately after they had claimed the reward. Interpreting their probable actions in terms of himself, Matalisi became convinced that they would do so.

Once after an emphatic recital of their common danger, Matalisi paused to stare anxiously at Yama Yama who was gazing in a sadly reflective manner into space with heavy-lidded eyes. Matalisi leaned forward and shook him gently. Yama Yama looked up and smiled vacantly.

"Thou hast the White Man's Curse!" exclaimed Matalisi.

Yama Yama shook his head slowly.

"No, no," said he, "I am but tired. Leave me to sleep."

As he spoke, the sound of a new voice saluting somebody in the village floated across the hot air, arousing Matalisi to a frenzied whisper:

"It is as I said! Here comes the dog to claim the cattle and bring destruction on our heads!"

Yama Yama stirred a little and peered across the sunlit village.

"True," he muttered, and laughed feebly, a hazy weak echo of his usual guffaw.

"Quick," whispered Matalisi, "what shall we do? Listen! Dead men tell no tales. We will act together. Do as I bid thee!"

"Greeting, my masters," came Maliko's voice from outside.

Matalisi returned the salutation; Yama Yama merely grunted. Maliko squatted down beside them, glancing covertly from one to the other and smirked with satisfaction. For a moment or two neither spoke; then said Maliko grinning—

"What think ye of the good news?"

Matalisi shot a glance at Yama Yama's expressionless face.

"It is good," he said gravely. "The cattle are thine. They await thee in the pastures beyond Avimi's village."

Maliko showed no surprise, although he had expected difficulty in obtaining the prize; he was too interested in his own cunning to be suspicious. Silently grinning he drew from his bundle the short stabbing-spear, and pointed to the blade where in the shoulders lay a dark-brown stain.

"Look, my brothers, the sword of the righteous bit deep and hard. Listen! On the night when ye gave me the good news did Mohammed and I talk together. Mohammed, as all the followers of the false prophet, was a coward, yet was he greedy for the cattle. He would do this thing, yet he would not. I bade him begone, leaving the glorious deed to me, but the smell of the kine lingered in his nostrils. *E-ehl* And at last because two hands are surer than one, I agreed that we should do this thing togehter. *E-ehl* And I returned to the missionary, my father, and we prayed together, he and I and those of the faith; and when night fell did I crave permission to sleep within his tent.

He smiled evilly.

"Then when he was well asleep did I leave the tent as silently as a jackal and traveling fast reached the plantation of Avimi as the moon dipped where Mohammed awaited me. And coming to the back of the bungalow we saw that no light burned, but sitting within at a table was the accursed son of shame, but the cause of my going made my heart swell as a lion's! *Eh-hl* But the heart of Mohammed had turned to water. But I spat in his face and

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laughed, bidding him come to watch me do the deed alone. *E-eh!*

"Softly did I rise behind the tyrant's back. *E-eh!* Then, my brothers, holding the blade thus—" he mimicked the action so realistically that Matalisi dodged—"did I strike mightily!

He paused at the end of the thrust and broke into a low chuckling laugh. Matalisi looked at Yama Yama who was watching with tired interest.

"The pig," continued Maliko contemptuously, "just grunted and died. *E-eh!* But the thrust was good, for I saw the red blood follow the blade as I plucked it out. Not a sound more as the blood flowed down. *E-eh!* it was good!"

He ceased, rolling the whites of his eyes at the twain.

"And then?"

"Then," resumed Maliko triumphantly, "I returned as I came. And behold at the coming of the sun I slept peacefully in the tent of the missionary—who saw me awake!"

He chuckled sardonically. Yama Yama grunted approval; Matalisi for a moment said nothing: then slowly—

"Then what did Mohammed?"

"*Tcht!*" snorted Maliko and licked his lips. "Mohammed hath a white liver! He hath gone to Uganda fearing to face the anger of the *Serkali*, leaving me to claim the cattle which is ours. *E-eh!*"

"Good," returned Matalisi; "let us go and count them! Oh, Yama Yama, arise!"

ONCE more he shook Yama Yama out of the insidious coma.

"Come, we will go to the pastures of Avimi to give Maliko his just reward," repeated Matalisi as Yama Yama, looking somnolently indifferent, clambered to his feet.

"Walk on ahead of us," commanded Matalisi of Maliko. "I would speak with Yama Yama."

Maliko, wondering vaguely, did as he was bid; Matalisi, shaking his companion vigorously, whispered fiercely in his ear as they walked in the slanting sunrays:

"Listen, fool, and remember what we agreed! Our lives—my life—depends on it. If he gets these cattle he will betray us! Remember Mohammed!"

The intensity of his voice and demeanor seemed to awaken Yama Yama a little, for he nodded slowly and grunted:

"Yes, yes, we are agreed," and then after a pause, looking owlishly at Matalisi—"What did we agree?"

"Fool!" exclaimed Matalisi. "Have I not told thee a score of times! We agreed—" then suddenly seeming to conclude that it was a hopeless task to make the other's dulled intelligence grasp an idea, concluded—"Do as I bid thee for our lives depend on it!"

"On what?" persisted Yama Yama stupidly.

"No matter. Do as I bid thee. Come, follow me!" And he moved ahead toward Maliko, who stood under a tree awaiting them.

"Yama Yama would say that it is not thou that has done the deed," said Matalisi to Maliko.

"*E-eh!*" ejaculated Maliko, conscious of the discrepancies in his story. "But yet it is true, by the heart of my mother! Ask ye of Mohammed," he added, licking his lips.

"Goest thou the way that Mohammed hath gone?" demanded Matalisi pointedly.

"Even so," replied Maliko, "I go too to Uganda."

"To Uganda!"

Matalisi laughed as he turned to see whether the sleepy Yama Yama was still following them.

"What dost thou mean?" demanded Maliko nervously.

"No matter. We will go to the pasture for the cattle now."

"But—" commenced Maliko, slightly reassured by the mention of cattle.

"Nay, nay. It is settled. The sun grows low. Come." And he led on down the path through the fields.

Maliko, as befitted his station, waited for Yama Yama to precede him. In Indian file they marched in silence, leaving the tilled land behind, across the clumps of bush and open grass country. As they neared a small sea of gently waving banana fronds, walking between high rank grass, Matalisi, in the van, suddenly sprang from the path with an exclamation of fear at a sting like the puncture of a needle driven deep into his brown hide.

A gray tsetse like a horsefly flew away toward the banana fronds.

"*Aie! Aie!*" moaned Matalisi, holding the back of his neck. "I too have been bitten by the White Man's Curse. *Aie! Aie-e!*"

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V

AT ABOUT an hour later Musisi came padding down the same path on his way from the Catholic mission to his village. He was chewing the cud of the murder affair which, from his simple-minded point of view, he considered a terrible offense against the good white God, personified in the shape of the white fathers, and in a lesser degree the white officials. They, he had been taught and could see as a peasant of an agricultural tribe, benefited him and his kind from the persecution of the chiefs and other tribes. They were a power for good, his good, and therefore to be propitiated.

The suggestion that a crime by one of his brother blacks might be avenged by the enraged whites upon all and sundry—a logical process in the native's mind as illustrated in Matalisi's fears—disturbed him and added to his indignation. This fear had increased until he grew to dread any absence from his village lest he might find it burned about his ears. There was more than one precedent for such action on the part of the whites which he and his brothers never for a moment forgot. At the earliest opportunity he had sought his white father and to him had imparted the gist of the seditious conversation which had undoubtedly instigated the murder.

But the priest was bound by the seal of the confessional; and saw that the case was far deeper than mere greed for cattle, concluding, influenced by natural prejudice, that the cure did not lie in secular administration; indeed, he bade Musisi to acquaint the authorities, forgetting that he was asking in effect that the man make a sacrifice of his life and all that was his, for Yama Yama and Matalisi were his own chiefs, a little too much for a converted native. However, Musisi had compromised in his vague evidence against Maliko who was out of the same tribe.

Ruminating on these matters vaguely, still obsessed by the terror of vengeance, Musisi struck off from the path on a short-cut through the plantation. As he neared the fringe the locality brought to his mind the image of Maliko in the dawn light of the fatal morning.

He pondered whether Maliko had committed the murder; and without imagination wondered how he could have seen Maliko, when undoubtedly, as the Protestanti missionary had testified, he was asleep in the mission tent the whole time.

Then his eyes trained to guard for snakes, observed an alien object at the bole of a banana plant. A second glance assured him that it was not a snake. He advanced and picked up a piece of white cloth trampled and green stained, which he recognized as the pill-box cap of Maliko. Examining it excitedly he noticed that it also had patches of purple brown.

Just as the fact that the stains were blood had percolated to his mind and he was beginning to speculate bovinely on how the cap came to be there, his attention was distracted by the sound of voices. His sharp eyes spotted the figures of two men on the edge of the field near the plantation. As an animal would, he swung toward the latest attraction to his curiosity. As he approached them he saw that they were digging or turning over the sods, with a short spear. Eagerly he hastened toward them. They heard him. One looked up. He was Matalisi. Something in his demeanor made Musisi halt some yards from them.

"What do you want?" demanded Matalisi while Yama Yama stopped work to look on vacantly.

"Nothing," said Musisi timidly.

"We're digging sweet potatoes," continued Matalisi. "Do not tell Avimi or he will make us pay for them."

This statement rather appealed to Musisi's predatory instincts. He advanced a step.

"Come here—come and help us," invited Matalisi, and taking the spear from Yama Yama's hand he advanced with it toward Musisi.

"I do not need any potatoes," stammered Musisi, suddenly affrighted.

"Yes, you do—they are good and sweet," said Matalisi, pointing with the spear as he continued to advance. "Come, and you shall have a share. You——"

But suddenly Musisi wheeled 'round and raced away through the plantation in fear of his life.

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A LITTLE JIGGER THIS MORNIN'

by Charles Tenney Jackson

"WITH the bone-dry bill," murmured Mr. Gilfish, "and the anti-shippin' law, and search and seizure, and the whole hell'n-high-water of gittin' a drink generally—what'll you do now, Colonel?"

Colonel Tunk removed one leg from the gallery rail of the Maddox Hotel from whose closed barroom door behind him came a melancholy aroma of dried fruit sirup, ant poison and dust, and surveyed Main Street from the railroad station to the cotton warehouse before which stood a three-bale load upon the top of which slumbered Hogjaw, Colonel Tunk's celebrated workin'-est nigger, while waiting for business to open.

A chicken crossed the street and thrust its head through the picket fence, attracted by a scraping of dishes in the hotel back-yard, and, after this stir of metropolitan activity, Main Street resumed its wonted calm of August noon under the benign eye of Colonel T. Sambola Tunk. Prone on his back upon the cotton bales, Hogjaw rolled his eyes to look at the warehouse door, aroused by the rattle of a chain. At any time now business might open.

Colonel Tunk replaced his leg on the gallery rail ere he answered Mr. Gilfish.

"This State, seh—to the Tunks—has never gone dry. As my brother, the senator who represents this sovereign but thirsty commonwealth at Washington, observes privately to me, while there is likker and a Tunk to drink it this State has never gone dry."

"Mebbe not," mused Mr. Gilfish, "as a church member in good standin' and runnin' fo' office, it won't do fo' me to say. But you, seh, have retired from politics."

"Tho'ily retired, seh. When prohibition came in, I got out."

Colonel Tunk's glance at Mr. Gilfish plainly implied that any man who remained in politics after he retired would not be trusted near the Tunk hen-house after dark.

"I presume, seh," he continued loftily, "you had your little jigger this mornin'?"

"Sure I had my little jigger this mornin'. I ain't crazy with the heat like some people. I has my little jigger every mornin'! I'd be the best durn candidate fo' the Assembly that our folks could put up if it wasn't fo' my breath. I'm always dreamin', Colonel, of some kind of likker that don't smell a man up so."

Mr. Gilfish slid lower in his chair and leaned closer to Colonel Tunk:

"That, seh, is what I drove to town to see you about. That young Tuttle who's been missionaryin' in Brazil fo' eight years is back and goin' to settle up the old Burch Tuttle property. And I want to rent his south forty, cotton bein' what it's goin' to be, Colonel."

Colonel Tunk sat up straighter, shooting a look of covert suspicion upon Mr. Gilfish. "The river forty, seh?"

"Yes, seh. You, as my attorney, seh——"

"You said cotton, seh?"

"Sure I said cotton."

Then Mr. Gilfish sat straighter also and looked cautiously about. Again his eyes

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widened upon Colonel Tunk. Colonel Tunk was looking at him; and an eloquent silence ensued there before the closed screen door of the Maddox House bar. A silence to which there reacted two souls with but a single thirst—Mr. Gilfish's mind slowly reverted to a Summer night when he had encountered Colonel Tunk and his celebrated workin'est nigger returning across the Reverend Burch Tuttle river forty with two coon dogs and a—jug. Colonel T. Sambola Tunk on a coon hunt with a jug.

Mr. Gilfish raised his eyes. Colonel Tunk still watched him absorbedly.

"As your attorney, seh, you desire me to negotiate with young Mr. Tuttle, representing the estate of the late Reverend Burch Tuttle, for the rental of the river forty for—cotton, seh?"

"I said—cotton, seh!"

Again that meaningful silence. The colonel slowly drew a long, official envelope from his frock coat pocket. He looked it over. Mr. Gilfish gazed. The colonel cleared his throat.

"It happens, seh, that I had in mind some plan of getting control of that forty. Fo'—fo' reasons of State, seh."

Mr. Gilfish nodded craftily. Colonel Tunk sat back as if to consider Mr. Gilfish from all possible slants and angles. Mr. Gilfish as a cotton-planter; Mr. Gilfish as a church member in good standing; Mr. Gilfish as a candidate; Mr. Gilfish as a—sublimated south Mississippi thirst. But no—Colonel Tunk rejected this. There was but one thirst and that was the thirst of a Tunk. Yet one thirst can not stand alone. Colonel Tunk leaned forth again, fingering the soiled envelope.

"Mr. Gilfish, seh, I trust you are not past the age of romance—of adventure, seh—of high quest and aspiration?"

"Romance?" Mr. Gilfish licked his lips nervously. "You mean—whisky?"

"Romantic possibilities, seh, confront the eager soul on every side. But this is a matter delved from the archives of State, seh. It was cotton that recalled my mind to it—and the preacher's south forty, seh. I—being a Tunk, seh—could not possibly negotiate with a Prohibitionist, but as an attorney fo' you, seh, well, it might suit certain—ah—interests."

And again Mr. Gilfish looked crafty, but mystified. He was silent, but he thrilled; he just felt dry around the gills and he craned his neck and rubbed his nose and waited, as befit one who believed in a little jigger of romance every mornin'.

"I have here, seh, a startling communication. As you know, Mr. Gilfish, the estate of my client, Miss Mattie Millard, adjoins the land of the late Reverend Burch Tuttle, and it was in looking after some claims of the Millard estate against the Government fo' cotton destroyed on an old steamboat in the Civil War, seh, that my brother, the distinguished senator, seh, made an amazing discovery."

"Oh, shucks," retorted Mr. Gilfish, "them old cotton claims kept the Millards poor for fifty years! That old steamboat that was sunk by Yank shells in the river bottoms—everybody knows that, and that you been lawin' about 'em since Miss Mattie was born. Thought you said—er—romance?"

"I do seh." Colonel Tunk held up the paper importantly. "In establishing the claims of my client, seh, my brother ably assisted, turning aside fo' a moment from his labors fo' the nation; and he found this——"

Colonel Tunk waved the papers with a hand that trembled slightly.

"This, seh! A copy of the ancient manifest of the steamboat, *J. J. Watson*, showing that the Millard cotton was illegally destroyed, seh."

"Well," grumbled Mr. Gilfish, "who cares a durn?"

"Fo' cotton—nobody! But my brother, the distinguished senator, was thrilled, seh, by this, and lost no time in communicating with me. On that steamboat, seh, when a Yank shell sent her to the bottom at high water in the big bend, was a bar'l that contained fifty-six gallons of twelve-year-old Bourbon!"

Mr. Gilfish's pent-up breath burst forth audibly.

"Kentucky whisky, seh," went on Colonel Tunk reverently, "distilled in '51—it is now sixty-five years old, seh—aged in oak! Do you comprehend, seh, when I say that the rotted timbers of that steamboat stick up in this degenerate era like a rock in a thirsty land?"

"Colonel," whispered Mr. Gilfish, "and we sit here ca'm!"

"Fortitude, seh! The time calls fo' true men. That bar'l, Mr. Gilfish, sealed and

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hidden from the vandals, lies in the sands of the river-bottom forty belongin' to this prohibition preacher who is this very evenin' to call upon Miss Mattie Millard, to sprawl in a hammock, seh, on the front gallery where the major and I were accustomed in happy days to toy with our toddies! This, seh, has been goin' on every evenin' since this bug-huntin' sky-pilot has returned to Mississippi City, Mississippi."

"You heard the gossip, Colonel?"

"I did, seh!"

"Never mind," retorted Mr. Gilfish. "This bar'l—suppose a Yank shell hit it?"

"Providence," returned Colonel Tunk, "has never yet dealt an irreparable blow to mankind. I have a trace of religion, seh."

"Mebbe," muttered Mr. Gilfish, "and mebbe Providence has gone dry, too, like the rest of creation."

The colonel ignored him grandly.

"Likker like this, seh—the rarest, mellerest in this glorious but fanatical republic, was never meant but fo' the supreme connoisseur, the great soul fitten to hold a jigger of it to the light and gaze through its pellucid depths—meanin' a Tunk, seh—a Tunk of Mississippi City, Mississippi."

"Thunder!" said Mr. Gilfish. "Don't I get none?"

"Pearls befo'—befo' a Gilfish, seh? However, we'll see. It will help a mighty if you can lease the preacher's forty."

"Why, the old timbers of that steamboat stick up high and dry in the sandbar bend since the river cut across behind Atcheson's woods! Everybody knows where she lays, Colonel."

"I have looked it over, seh. I took Hogjaw there on a coon hunt twice, seh—an entirely reliable nigger, the best and workin'est nigger in the county, I will remark, seh."

"I know. Dog-gone! But I got to be careful—me runnin' fo' office, Colonel. As my attorney you can go fix that lease with this young Tuttle. And I suppose you heard the scandal?"

Colonel Tunk waved an indifferent hand.

"Concernin' Miss Millard, seh, and this missionary's attentions, there can be no such word as scandal."

"Oh, shucks! I didn't mean Mattie Millard! Bugs, Colonel!"

"Bugs, seh?"

"He about broke up his father's church with 'em. Got 'em all pickled."

"Some members of that church, Mr. Gilfish, are open to suspicion. You, yourself, seh——"

"I don't mean the congregation. Bugs, seh—all pickled—six glass jars of 'em, big like demijohns, and he comes luggin' 'em right to the parsonage; and right away the deacons appointed a committee to go call on him. And what do you think the deacons found this preacher doin'?"

"What," answered Colonel Tunk imperturbably, "does any man do with likker?"

"He was soppin' around in it with a pair of forceps."

"Extraordinary, seh. Seen some hard likker in my time but none that ever required forceps."

"He was fishin' up bugs, and when the wimmen demanded that he take his demijohns right out of the parsonage, this young Tuttle he ca'mly tells him that he brought 'em back from Brazil fo' the Gove'ment. Yes, seh—he just natchelly pickled every bug he saw up the Orinoco fo' the Bureau of Entomology in Washington, and now he's sortin' 'em, it seems, and fixin' 'em, and——"

Colonel Tunk interrupted suddenly.

"He said so, seh?"

"Yes, but the wimmen are hollerin' their heads off." Mr. Gilfish lowered his voice and looked about cautiously. "Just between me and you, Colonel, what do you think of it?"

"Genius!" answered the colonel solemnly. "I've heard of some good excuses, seh, but this rises to heights, seh, hitherto unattained. A man can go to N'Awlyins and buy a gallon of whisky and stir in a pint of potato bugs, seh, and come back across the State line—all in the name of science, Mr. Gilfish; and strain out his bugs and have his little jigger every mornin' free and unterrified. Statesmanship, seh! Genius of the highest order!"

"Dog-gone!" ejaculated Mr. Gilfish, "any man that runs for office in this State ought to be an entomologist! But the wimmen are demandin' that Tuttle take his bugs right out of the parsonage, Gove'ment or no Gove'ment. Mattie Millard is president of the Anti-Liquor League, which maybe is why Lafe Tuttle goes up there every night to call on her—and maybe it ain't!"

Mr. Gilfish grinned evilly. Colonel T. Sambola Tunk straightened his string tie,

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brushed his linen trousers and arose with distant dignity.

"Miss Mattie's name, seh, in this affair—" he waved his hand consigning Mr. Gilfish, the preacher, the bugs out to the sterile suburbs of his interest—"I will take up the matter of this lease, Mr. Gilfish, in a purely professional manner, seh."

"All right," grinned Mr. Gilfish again, "but you better look out. What does a girl see in a durned entomologist anyhow? Can bugs stir the heart of love? They cain't—I know durn well they cain't!"

Colonel Tunk looked cryptically at Mr. Gilfish. He strode into the Maddox House to noonday dinner. In front of the cotton warehouse Colonel Tunk's nigger chewed a magnolia petal which had fallen into his open mouth as he slumbered; business on Main Street seemed about as usual.

THAT same evening Colonel Tunk strode up the pecan avenue that led from the pike to the ancient mansion of the Millards. The front gate was carefully hung with a trace-chain loaded with scrap-iron to keep wandering plantation mules from invading Miss Mattie's vegetables now occupying once ornate parterres, and so successful was this device that neither a mule nor a human could open it. Gentlemen straddled. Ladies went around by the carriage entrance.

Colonel Tunk straddled with dignity and long practise. Upon the wide porticoed gallery he saw Miss Mattie arrayed in shirt-waist and fine linen. She hurried to call off the chorusing coon dogs which raced about the ante-bellum house from the servants' quarters and hailed Colonel Tunk blithely.

"Evenin', Colonel! Don't let our good, teetotal dogs bite you—they might fall from grace. Too much scandal in the church now, you know."

Colonel Tunk bowed over Miss Mattie's cool, fine hands. She smilingly turned to a long-legged young man who was sliding lazily up from the hammock.

"Colonel Tunk—Mr. Tuttle—Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle, who may take his father's old church, now he's back from missionarying."

"Ah, Colonel Tank!" The young man extended a bronzed hand.

"Tunk!" beamed Miss Mattie.

"Oh—Tunk! Delighted! I remember the family, but I've been away years, Colonel Tunk!"

"You now feel called to labor, seh, in our fruitful but dusty vineyard?"

"Well," mused Mr. Tuttle, "if the elders had seen me first, I reckon they'd have hesitated. I switched off a bit in the Orinoco country—went to collecting specimens for the Department of Agriculture. Great stuff, Colonel—highly interestin'!"

"Ah," murmured Colonel Tunk. "I have heard, seh."

"I reckon. How'd I know the State had gone dry, and had this bone-dry bill, when I landed here with my bags and buggage, so to speak? Why, they insisted that I dump the alcohol off my bugs the first day I came—my beautiful bugs, Colonel, that the chief of the bureau is crazy to get."

"Bugs is bugs," returned Colonel Tunk, "but booze is booze in Mississippi."

"Yes, but this—awful stuff made out of Trinidad molasses and now flavored with the rarest, weirdest collection of *Dactylithera gazoopi* that ever come from South America! And I've got a tailless bat——"

"Eh?" queried Colonel Tunk. "No, seh."

"Comes from Bolivia—west coast. Very rocky, dry country——"

"Not interested, seh, in anything from a dry country."

"Ah, but you must see my *gazoopi!* And did you ever see a nine-clawed toad?"

"Seh, I never drink moonshine whisky."

Miss Mattie giggled joyously. The tall young man sat back in the hammock.

"Well, they got me under suspicion, that's all. It's all absurd. Why the Government wants me to go to Tibet after a predatory skink that might be of value as a parasite for——"

"Oh, but you're going to stay here," cried Miss Mattie, "and take the church and shake up things. You said you'd sell the south forty and build a gymnasium for the young people, and put a little pep in our work."

"Speaking of pep," pursued young Mr. Tuttle, "why don't you make Colonel Tunk one of those frosty drinks? Ice and sugar and lemon and mint and——"

"Seh?" demanded Colonel Tunk eagerly.

"That's all," answered Mr. Tuttle placidly. "She calls it a—loolip."

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Miss Mattie was mixing them. Colonel Tunk sighed. Loolips! Loolips for three! He dismally watched old Jasper fetching the glasses. Old Jasper who, for forty years, had picked the mint for Colonel Tunk and Major Millard and tinkled the ice on this same gallery! Colonel Tunk sought to divert his thoughts.

"A client of mine, seh, has inquired about leasing your river-bottom forty. It was that, I assure you, that brought me here, seh."

"The river forty? What for?"

"Cotton, seh."

"Cotton? On that patch of sand and brush?"

"You would lease it, Mr. Tuttle—open lease fo' any purpose?"

"Go to it." Mr. Tuttle sipped his loolip. "Cotton has changed since I went away, if that sand-bar will raise cotton. Great place for coons, Colonel—and red bugs; and, by the way, they used to say Confederate gold was buried in the wreck of that old steamboat in the bend."

"Very int'restin'," mused the colonel. "You'd not mind if we looked into it?"

"Mind," Mr. Tuttle laughed. "Highly gratified!"

"Why, Colonel, you dear old adventurer, you! Digging for buried treasure—at your age!" cried Miss Mattie.

"My age, Miss Mattie? When has age dulled the spirit of true romance? Entomology, Miss Mattie, might quench the divine spark, but a gentleman of Mississippi can not age when there is—eh, Miss Mattie, when you are about to look upon!"

"You dear!" smiled Miss Mattie. "Dick, why can't you talk like that? And every time I preside at the Anti-Liquor League meetings I have to defend Colonel Tunk against some suspicion!"

Colonel Tunk had his hat and cane; he bowed grandly, loftily, putting aside the idea that a Tunk could need apologist. But on his way down the walk he couldn't put away the suspicion that the Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle had reached from the hammock to take Mattie's little hand and that he was murmuring things.

He was, and Mattie was murmuring back:

"I didn't say I'd marry you! I didn't! You'll have to get rid of those bugs first, Dick—every one of 'em! You're under terrible suspicion!"

ON A warm, starry night of that same week there might have been seen, wending his way to the river-bottom land back of the Millard cotton-press, Colonel T. Sambola Tunk. Behind him wended his well-known workin'est nigger carrying a shovel and a jug. After him wended two of Colonel Tunk's equally famous coon dogs whose strictly professional interest was distracted again. Why a jug on a coon hunt? And discreetly in the distance until he had gained the cover of the river-bottom brush, as befitted a candidate running for the Legislature, wended Mr. Gilfish. Not all the coon dogs in Mississippi can save a statesman of that commonwealth who is discovered in juxtaposition to a jug.

When the procession had reached the blackberry jungle on the ancient sand-bar, Mr. Gilfish quickened his pace and his interest to discover Colonel Tunk sitting on his jug. Thereupon Mr. Gilfish ushered forth his own jug from beneath his coat and likewise sat upon it. They gazed upon some blackened timbers that protruded from the sands and bramble. The workin'-est nigger gazed at a stone bruise on his heel. The two coon dogs gazed expectantly at the two jugs—they had gone hunting with Colonel Tunk before.

"Wahm night," ventured Mr. Gilfish.

Colonel Tunk waved his hand relevantly toward the obscure wreck of the *J. J. Watson.*

"Hogjaw, you will proceed to dig. I have mapped out the presumable fo'deck of this steamboat, seh, and the sand can not be mo' than fo' feet over it. Proceed, nigger, proceed."

Hogjaw rolled his eyes at the darkening woods:

"Hants is bad in dese bottoms, Kunnel. Culled man like me done got no business yere afteh dahk!"

"What we are about to uncover, seh, will exorcise any ghost that walks. Any Mississippi ghost of the old régime, Mr. Gilfish, would be proud and happy to be with us, would it not?"

"One little jigger of that sixty-five-year-old Bourbon leakin' down the wind toward the cemetery, Colonel Tunk, and there wouldn't be a member of the old Democracy in his grave by mornin'! One whiff of that bar'l, and they'd be a resurrection that'd make the Day of Judgment lack

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a quorum of all our old families, seh."

Colonel Tunk parted his coat-tails over his jug and smoked. The workin'est nigger worked. At times he looked fearsomely upward. The coon dogs cocked their ears and gazed into the hackberry trees. They earnestly contemplated the hole in which the workin'est nigger worked. They gazed at the two jugs. Presently the older of the two coon dogs arose and went to smell of Mr. Gilfish's jug. Then he smelled of Colonel Tunk's jug. Thereafter he took a respectful position five paces in the rear of Colonel Tunk, showing thereby that he not only had been long in the county and understood its social gradations but also could distinguish various grades of hard likker.

Time and the mosquitoes flew as the best workin'est nigger of Mississippi City, Mississippi, worked. Now there began certain hollow, cloddy sounds, and Hogjaw looked up over his pit anxiously.

"Nothing," commanded Colonel Tunk, "except that dirt is falling into the old cargo hold of that steamboat. Proceed!"

"I'se hittin' a bar'l!" yelled Hogjaw. "A bar'l, Kunnel!"

Colonel Tunk and Mr. Gilfish hit the spot simultaneously. Mr. Gilfish went flat on his stomach over the rotted deck timbers. He peered by the lantern's light into a cavernous depth.

"Talk about Providence!" he gasped. "Hit plumb on that bar'l! Bar'l big as a b'ar! Durn her old crumbly dirt hide—here she be!"

"Mr. Gilfish—seh! Restrain yo'self! That bar'l——"

"Right alongside some old rusty pig iron and junk just as the deckhands stowed her in '63! Durn my old shoes if she ain't! Right here—fo' noble men and true, Colonel—first crum of sense I ever heard come out of that Civil War—hid up that bar'l of Bourbon for you and me 'til all creation went dry!"

Colonel Tunk climbed down in the hole. Reverently he passed a hand over that bar'l. He took off his hat. His lips moved. Mr. Gilfish looked up.

"The old-time religion's good enough fo' him," murmured Mr. Gilfish.

Then spoke the voice of authority without a tremor.

"Hogjaw, go fetch that mule and the stone sled and ropes. And Mr. Gilfish, seh, kindly let go my coat-tails and compose you'self."

"And me," lamented Mr. Gilfish, "I only brought one measly little gallon jug!"

Colonel Tunk folded his arms Napoleonically.

"A jug, seh, is sacrilegious. This bar'l—filled as it is with sixty-five-year-old Bourbon—must repose first of all in my back cellar. Champagne, seh, as Colonel Ingersoll said, bubbles with the imprisoned laughter of the peasant girls of France; but this bar'l, Mr. Gilfish, whispers of the smiles and loveliness of the girls of Louisville, Kentucky, than which, seh——"

"About ten gallons of them peasant girls, for mine," chuckled Mr. Gilfish. "Snake her out, Hogjaw! How much we got to give the senator, Colonel, for delvin' in them archives of State?"

"Seh?" returned the colonel, and as he turned, Mr. Gilfish saw a bulge in the rear pocket of Colonel Tunk's yellow linen trousers.

"Totin' a gun," whispered Mr. Gilfish to himself, and right there he felt that all was not right with the world.

He watched dismally while Hogjaw snaked the bar'l out of the rotted wood and sand, and when the mule drawing the stone sled with the treasure-trove ambled up from the river bottoms to the higher land with Colonel Tunk in the van, Mr. Gilfish brought up the rear, considering just how far a candidate and a church member in good standin' might go in defense of his honor, his rights and a bar'l of Bourbon.

And silence fell and dawn came; and afar in the river-bottom forty of the Reverend Burchard Tuttle estate, two coon dogs sat gazing at two abandoned jugs. Nothing had gone into them, nothing come out, and the two coon dogs presently lifted up their voices and howled at the end of a misspent night.

But as the cavalcade reached the lane back of the Millard cotton-press just where the river-forty fence ended, Colonel Tunk stopped abruptly. Past the mule and the stone sled, Mr. Gilfish slipped to gaze palpitatingly. Even the colonel was daunted. There, on the rail fence, whistling jauntily in the fresh, early dawn sat the Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle with a shotgun on his knees!

"Squirrel huntin'," whispered Mr. Gilfish, "ain't satisfied with chasin' bugs—no,

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gotta be right across our road at four o'clock in the mornin'! Ain't we no rights, Colonel —you and me?"

"Seh, the cotton-press. The abandoned cotton-press on the Millard land. We can not, seh, take this bar'l down the main pike in broad day. The cotton-press, Mr. Gilfish, is unvisited by any one."

A lucky detour behind the brush brought the bar'l and its retinue up behind the gaunt shed that housed the cotton-press, and with a sigh of relief Mr. Gilfish saw the mule and the niggger vanish in the wide doorway. He hesitated, a soul distraught between trusting Colonel Tunk with the bar'l, and his career as a candidate; it was a relief when Colonel Tunk emerged without wiping his lips. Mr. Gilfish led the way on, whispering the need of caution. The nigger led the mule back through the brush and regained the pike.

Down the lane Colonel Tunk and Mr. Gilfish rejoined the outfit and went on slowly the mile into town. Back on the rail fence in the dewy morning, Lafayette B. Tuttle looked long and cautiously at the distant figures.

"I could swear," he murmured, "that tall old chap is Colonel Tunk. Hunting coons with a mule and a stone sled, eh? I've heard of hunting them with a jug, but——"

Then Lafe Tuttle whistled softly, jumped over the fence, after looking cautiously around trundled forth a wheelbarrow laden with a number of glass containers, each in a wicker case, and with these he set off down the lane, and turned in at the ancient and unused Millard cotton-press. At the big doors he started to discover mule tracks leading within.

"Now, what? I was sure this was the safest place in the county for my specimens —as long as I had to take 'em out of the parsonage to avoid a row with the good ladies!"

He stole within, barring the doors again. In the dusty gloom he made out the form of the disused machinery, heaps of old gunny sacking and a general aspect of decay. The mule tracks ended there. Mr. Tuttle sleuthed about. The dust had been disturbed at one side of the musty sack pile. He dug within, and presently whistled again, stood up, rubbed his chin and gazed.

"A bar'l in Mississippi," he murmured, "a bar'l means one thing only. A bar'l and Colonel Tunk—Colonel Tunk and a bar'l."

He sat down and lit a college pipe, and looked at his alcoholic containers; he looked at the bar'l and shook his head.

Safe and secluded from his congregation, young Mr. Tuttle pulled enjoyably at his pipe when he heard an audible sniff outside the cotton-press shed. And then a murmur:

"Tobacco smoke? In my old cotton-press. The field hands know they mustn't smoke there!"

And a firm hand swung back the wooden bar of the big doors. Hastily Mr. Tuttle sat on his college pipe. Innocently he stared at the door. Mattie Millard stood there in the first rays of the rising sun, trying to accustom her eyes to the gloom. She had a little basket and her skirt and shoes were dewy and dusty, and she was adorable, but the Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle wished she was in Tibet hunting his predatory skinks. The president of the Anti-Liquor League had caught him in her cotton-shed with a bar'l —alone with a bar'l, a bold, bad bar'l, and he was in trouble enough with his bug pickle without this.

"Boy?" called Miss Mattie sharply. "Come out of that shed!"

Then she stepped close—

"You know smoking in the field buildings is——"

Then Miss Mattie's eyes narrowed—

"Oh—it's you?"

"Yes," sighed Mr. Tuttle, "and what are you doing up so confounded early? Picking scuppanong grapes, I suppose?"

"Richard! You're smoking!"

"The tropics," ventured Richard, "tobacco keeps away fever, you know. Beastly habit, my dear, and I stole down here this morning alone to try and break myself of it."

"And your pickled bugs!"

"I know. I toted them out of the parsonage before daylight, Mattie, to avoid scandal. Thought I could hide 'em up in your abandoned press until I could get 'em arranged and shipped to Washington. Honest—Mattie—honest Injun!"

"And a barrel! Oh, Dick! A bootlegging outfit in my cotton-shed! Richard Tuttle, what are you about—I'll bet anything it's whisky!"

"As I surmise that Colonel Tunk was here not an hour ago, I won't bet anything else."

"Colonel Tunk?"

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"Quite so. A dastardly crime has been committed. A bar'l—a lone, helpless bar'l, has been kidnaped from its home and held in duress vile here under cover of night."

"And you, Dick? What were you doing here?"

"Peaceful pursuit of science. My *Dactylithera gazoopi*——"

"I don't believe you!" Miss Mattie picked up her skirts and moved closer to the bar'l. "Trying to incriminate the Colonel, too!"

Mr. Tuttle was sticking a jack-knife in the edge of the moldered bung. He twisted it about, he withdrew the knife and smelled of it. Then, in some sudden excitement, he secured a hatchet and worked and hammered at the bung until he had knocked it out. Then he bent and smelled again, long, eagerly into the cavernous bar'l.

"Oh, my—oh—me!" gasped Mr. Tuttle, "where did they get that!"

"Whisky?" put in Miss Mattie innocently and amazed at Mr. Tuttle's fervor.

"Whisky such as Colonel Tunk never wotted of! That bar'l? It's been buried somewhere for forty years—and the mule-tracks came up from my bottom land. Found on my premises—so I get half. Stored on your land, so you get half. Two halves leave a large hole—and Colonel Tunk gets the hole. *Oh, tempora! Oh, mores!* Oh, Colonel! Tonight, I see war, pillage, murder abroad in the land!"

The Reverend Mr. Tuttle raised a reverent hand over the bar'l:

"This I dedicate to the Red Cross—every wonderful, ruby drop of it. I've got four empty five-gallon jars which I was going to hide just to get rid of 'em. But now—I know a chap who will see that it goes to the cause of our country. And Colonel Tunk?" Mr. Tuttle stopped staring at his specimen jars. "Confusion to all rum heads! Let every *gazoopi* do its duty!"

"Dick!" gasped Miss Mattie, "As president of the Anti-Liquor League, I demand that you destroy that stuff!"

"Not for worlds! Somewhere in France, in the Red Cross hospitals, my old college chum, Dr. Bill Woodward, will put every blessed drop of it to suffering humanity! And Tunk—oh, blessed thought! We will cure Colonel Tunk of ever touching booze, again, Mattie dear!"

"Dick!" She gasped, watching Mr. Tuttle, who had gone to fetch a wide-mouthed empty specimen-jar from his bundle.

He rolled the bar'l so that from the gaping bunghole there fell a deep-throated *glug-glup, glug-glup*—as the richest, rarest Bourbon that ever escaped the palate of a Tunk went into the entomological containers. Mr. Tuttle fetched another, and filled it; another, another—he hovered with scientific solicitude over that bunghole until the last murmur of the imprisoned laughter of the peasant girls of Louisville, Kentucky, of '51, was gone. Then he was removing his specimens to some new paper cartons from the wheelbarrow.

"I had to classify and mount 'em some time," he announced, "and you, Mattie, dear, shall be a witness to my purity of purpose."

"Richard!" Mattie exclaimed, severely. "I forbid—and what are you doing with that bug pickle?"

For Mr. Tuttle with a non-scientific grin, was calmly emptying the first of his entomological jars, minus his loved *Gazoopi*, into the bunghole of Colonel Tunk's bar'l.

"What am I doing? Going to cure Colonel Tunk of the booze habit. I have eighteen gallons more or less of the worst alcoholic concoction that ever floated a *gazoopi* to exchange for this nectar of Bacchus! One swig of this stuff and the colonel will be up to sign the pledge next Wednesday night meetin'."

"It'll simply kill him!"

"It won't. He can't drink it, that's all."

"He will. Those old soaks never know the difference. He—oh, Dick. This is frightful!"

And Miss Mattie fled out to the lane.

Mr. Tuttle lingered to drive in the ancient bung, carefully rubbing some mold into the jack-knife marks. Then he as carefully hid the bar'l back under the moldy bale sacking and began to remove all traces of his hour's labor. Far in a recess of the cotton-press reposed the dank and dripping victims of Mr. Tuttle's quest of science up the Orinoco, neatly packed in the new receptacles, while his wickered jars filled with the priceless liquor, were as thoughtfully concealed in another spot. When the Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle rejoined Miss Millard in the lane he was whistling innocently.

"One hour after sunset tonight, they'll be back. Colonel Tunk—and, if I mistake not—Mr. Amos P. Gilfish, candidate for the

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Assembly from this district, who is a political adept in playing both sides against the middle. Not a minute will they leave that bar'l after nightfall. Two brands plucked from the burnin', Mattie, dear."

"It'll simply kill 'em," wailed Miss Mattie, "and then I'll never marry you!"

"It's a go!" exclaimed Dick Tuttle joyously. "Wait and see!"

AT THREE o'clock that afternoon there came stealthily up through the sultry calm of the river-bottom brush, Mr. Amos P. Gilfish, burdend with a five-gallon demijohn, a large gimlet and a funnel. After watching the Millard mansion half a mile away for a time he crept to the cotton shed, yanked up a loose board, slipped under and stole to the gunny sacking. Lifting this stuff far enough to insert his gimlet merely, he bored away in the moldy oak. Then he inserted a small tap, and watched the liquor flow into his demijohn through the funnel.

"When it's likker," sighed Mr. Gilfish, "no man can trust no man. Mebbe that old fool Tunk's already got his."

He licked his chaps, dipped in a finger, licked his fingers; licked his chaps, rubbed his stomach and sighed—

"I reckon the Colonel knows likker all right."

And canting his demijohn over his shoulder Mr. Gilfish sought the concealment of the river-bottom brush.

An hour later those identical laurel bushes parted and the head of Colonel Tunk's nigger was thrust cautiously out. Surveying the abandoned cotton shed, he turned and waved an arm. Thereafter Colonel Tunk himself emerged. Dignifiedly and armed with two ten-gallon demijohns he followed his majordomo into the building. And with a murmur Colonel Tunk indicated the proceedings. Hogjaw merely pushed the sacking away from the bar'l end, inserted an inch-bit, bored a hole, inserted a tap and then, amidst an eloquent silence, Colonel Tunk listened to a gurgle.

Not for worlds would he have put sacrilegious lips to that Bourbon of '51 in the banal surroundings of the Millard cotton shed. Thirteen gallons he drew from the bar'l, and considering the aging process of the lapse of time Colonel Tunk reflected that was enough. To Mr. Gilfish he would bequeath the bitter dregs.

"Plug that hole, Hogjaw, and smear a little mold over it. No particular use of this Gilfish knowing the bar'l's been tampered with. If so he can't protest as a candidate and a church member in good standin'."

"Ain't yo' gwine t' taste it, Kunnel—right yere?"

"Seh, tote that whisky down to my buckboard. There is but one spot which this whisky shall grace and that is my decanters, on such occasions as worthy spirits shall gather around."

Hogjaw smelled his fingers. But Colonel Tunk followed out and down to his buckboard, conscious that upon this limb of a lower race he was impressing the virtues of discipline and self-control. Then Colonel Tunk drove homeward, the demijohns under the seat artfully concealed by a laprobe. Passing the Millard mansion on the pike, the colonel bowed distantly. He saw Miss Mattie on the gallery, and a long-legged young man in the hammock—with a loolip. Colonel Tunk looked straight ahead, erect with the proper pride of a Tunk.

"Gid-dap!" he murmured and drove on.

Between the honeysuckle the Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle thrust a pair of field-glasses and searched minutely every detail of Colonel Tunk's rig; the unobtrusive bulges beneath the linen covering, the nigger dutifully behind on guard with his legs swinging down to the dust, the colonel upright in the seat flicking a horsefly off the mule's flank. The seeker after truth put down the glasses with a sigh.

"And Gilfish got his an hour ago! Neither one would trust the other forty minutes alone with a bar'l. Well, I wouldn't either!"

"They can't drink that stuff you put in their barrel!" cried Miss Mattie, "I tell you it'll kill 'em!"

"Remember what you said, Mattie! If they do, you lose—and you got to marry me. If they can't, I lose—and I marry you! See?"

"Dick," she said earnestly, "you better quit the pulpit and go into politics."

"After dinner we'll drive into town and get the mail. Colonel Tunk and Mr. Gilfish will be, as usual, sitting before the Maddox House bar, unless—well, we shall see what we shall see!"

And that evening Miss Mattie's surrey drove slowly down Main Street just as

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Colonel Tunk, immaculate in black alpaca coat, linen trousers and Panama hat sauntered out to his accustomed cane-bottomed chair. Mr. Gilfish was there, feet upon the rail, watching the world go by.

"Evenin', seh!"

"Evenin', Colonel," responded Mr. Gilfish.

"I trust you feel well, seh?"

Colonel Tunk's eye wandered to the Millard surrey before the post-office from which two young people seemed to be covertly watching the Maddox House gallery.

"It must have been wahm in the river bottoms. I reckon you went coon-huntin', seh?"

"I reckon you did, seh!"

"Perfectly correct. In the matter of whisky I carry a spear that knows no brother. I took my share, seh."

"I reckon I beat you to it." Mr. Gilfish sat up and shook a melancholy head at Colonel Tunk. "Five gallons of that stuff down in my cellar, now; but—Colonel—how you feel this evenin'?"

"Never better in my life, seh!"

"Well, I—I feel strange. It ain't that I'm sick, but I feel curious down in my system. The fact is, Colonel—I quit likker!"

"Seh?"

"I took a little jigger of that sixty-five-year-old whisky this evenin'. It was kind of strange, so I took another little jigger. Pretty soon I began to feel curious in my insides, so I poured me another little snifter, and right after that, Colonel, it—happened!"

"What, seh?"

"Must be I ain't been brought up to the grades of hard likker, Colonel, that you have. Mebbe I drunk too much bootleg in my time. Anyhow, I sat there, feelin' mighty queer down in my system, when I happened to look at the end of that demmyjohn, and right in the neck I saw it. Stickin' its head out, all black, and clammy, a whalin' durn big bug about two inches long—all horns and claws and eyes!"

"Mr. Gilfish, seh!"

"I didn't wait to investigate. I give a yell and lit out for town! When a man gets to seein' things, he better quit likker. Did you see anything, Colonel—in yours?"

"I—" murmured Colonel Tunk softly, "took my little jigger this evenin'. And I am glad you quit—likker like that, seh, was never created fo' a candidate and a church member in good standin'. Whisky like that is fo' a Tunk, seh—a Tunk of Mississippi."

"You drank that stuff?" gasped Mr. Gilfish, weakly.

"I did, seh—and I heard the stars sing together in their courses; I saw the Golden Age come again to earth, seh; and life and death and love had deeper meanin' as the divine mysteries unfolded. My soul, seh, soared to the untrammeled spheres——"

"Hold on!" whispered Mr. Gilfish, "there goes the preacher into the express office to ship his durn bugs off to Washington! And here comes Mattie Millard, and I'm too sick to talk to anybody!"

The Millard family rig stopped before the Maddox House.

"Evenin', Colonel!" chirruped Miss Mattie, her blue eyes blithe with divine mysteries that even Colonel Tunk had never fathomed. "I trust you're well, Colonel!"

"Never better, Miss Mattie. And you?"

"Fine! Just drove in so's Dick could send off his specimens and bring peace to the church again. And what do you think? Somehow, he lost the biggest one—his beautiful black *Gazoopus!*"

She drove on. The Reverend Lafayette B. Tuttle joined her down the street. It seemed that some puzzled and happy laughter floated back to Mr. Gilfish and Colonel Tunk before the closed Maddox bar.

After a while, Mr. Gilfish licked his lips worriedly and felt of his stomach.

"I reckon, Colonel, my taste for likker never was fitten to hist me up to them untrammeled spheres like yours. Mebbe that old bar'l whispered to you of the laughter of the girls of Louisville, Kentucky, of '51, but if what I saw stickin' its head out of my demmyjohn was one of 'em, then all I got to remark is that she was *black!*"

"It's time you quit, seh," murmured Colonel Tunk, "high time. Real whisky, Mr. Gilfish, and true romance is not fo' you."

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THE BELLS of SAN JUAN

A Four-Part Story

Part III

by Jackson Gregory

Author of "Yahoya," "Silver Slippers," etc.

The first part of the story quickly retold in story form

THERE are many San Juans, but only one San Juan of the bells. High in the mission tower they hang, and when a baby is born, or a strong man dies, or there is a wedding or a discovery of gold, their ringing chants the message to the little desert town.

The girl from the city had been in San Juan but a few hours when she heard the bells toll dismally.

"What does it mean?" she asked Ignacio Chavez, the bell-ringer.

"There is a man dead," replied the half-breed, "and there will be more work for Roderico Nortone."

But it was not until later in the day that Rod Norton, the young sheriff, heard the tolling bells as he rode across the desert. Straight back to town he raced and went to the Casa Blanca, saloon, gambling-house, and ante-room to perdition, owned by his enemy, the vicious Jim Galloway. There he found that a sheep-herder from Las Palmas had been killed.

"Who did it?" he asked.

"I did," retorted "Kid" Rickard, a sullen youth with a low forehead and pale blue eyes.

"Who saw the shooting?"

"Jim Galloway and Antone."

Antone was one of Galloway's henchmen.

The sheriff at once started a cross-examination. The slayer and the witnesses told straight, consistent stories. Rickard had shot in self-defense, they said. Finally Norton went in to look at the corpse of Bisbee, the dead sheep-herder.

"Does any one know where Bisbee kept his money?" he asked.

"In his boots," answered two voices together.

The men crowded about the body as Norton's voice rang out—

"Then tell me, Jim Galloway, how does it happen that the right boot is on the left foot?"

Norton left the place without making any arrests and went straight to Struve's Hotel. On the door he noticed a new sign:

DR. V. D. PAGE
PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON
ROOM 5, STRUVE'S HOTEL

There was an old bullet wound on his hand that needed attention. He went to room five and knocked. The door was opened by the girl from the city.

"Is Dr. Page in?" asked Rod.

"Come in," replied the girl. "I am Dr. Page."

THAT night the two met again at the home of John Engle, San Juan's banker. Norton went to call on Florence Engle. Virginia Page bore a letter of introduction to the Engles, from a common friend. She was greeted warmly by Mr. and Mrs. Engle, but Florrie's manner was rather cool. The banker told her about Rod Norton:

Billy Norton, the young man's father, had been sheriff before him. He had promised to "get" Jim Galloway of the Casa Blanca. But Galloway, or one of his men, had "got" Norton first, shooting him in the back. Young Roderick, who had returned from college three years before to manage his father's ranch, at once ran for the office left vacant by the elder Norton's death. He was elected by a huge majority.

As Engle finished his story another caller was announced. It was Caleb Patten, dapper, conceited, and hitherto San Juan's only physician. His manner indicated plainly his disdain for the "lady doctor."

Norton finally took his departure. A few moments later a boy came to the door saying that Ignacio Chavez, the bell-ringer, was ill, and wished the lady doctor to attend him.

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Virginia left at once, accompanied by Engle. Outside they met Norton.

"I sent the boy," he said. "It was a ruse, 'Brocky' Lane is hurt bad and I want Miss Page to ride out with me to see him. I can't trust Caleb Patten."

An hour later the girl was riding northward toward Mount Temple, where lay the wounded "Brocky" Lane. Norton rode by her side.

"Lane is foreman of a big cattle ranch," he explained, "and is secretly working with me and my deputy, Tom Cutter. He has been shot down by Moraga, one of Galloway's men. We got Moraga, luckily.

"But we must not let Galloway know that Lane was anywhere near Mount Temple or that he or Cutter or I have the least interest in the place. That is the reason for all this secrecy."

They reached Mount Temple and dismounted. After climbing for what seemed to the girl must be hours, they stopped to rest.

As Virginia Page lay under the midnight sky and watched the clear-cut profile of the young sheriff, she felt strangely glad that she had come to San Juan.

Norton knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"Ten minutes more and we'll be there," he said. "Ready?"

THEY found the wounded man lying in a little pocket in the side of the cliff. Virginia hastily examined his wound and demanded that he be taken where she could work with a light. Rod carried Lane along a perilous path into a cave. There the wound was carefully dressed, and there they prepared to spend the night.

Before dawn next morning Norton awakened Virginia, and through a hole in the wall of the chamber in which she slept he showed her a third cave in which there were stacks of rifles and boxes of cartridges.

"Jim Galloway's," he said, "and this is his plan. He will arm a crowd of his best men, swoop down on San Juan, rob the bank, rush in automobiles to Pozo and Kipple's Town, rob the banks there, levy on the Las Palmas mine, and then steer straight for the border. If it works out right, the papers will record it as a daring raid by Mexican bandits."

Leaving Brocky Lane to be rescued later by Cutter, Virginia and Norton rode back toward SanJuan. Virginia stopped at Las Estrellas, where she found a couple of patients, so that it was well into the afternoon and with a securely established alibi that she reached the hotel.

There she found Florence Engle. Frivolous, spoiled, but nevertheless likable, the young girl had come to apologize for her coolness of the evening before. As they were chatting on the hotel porch Florrie exclaimed—

"Oh, who is the handsome stranger coming here with that horrid Rickard person?"

It was Elmer, Virginia's younger brother, whom she had brought to San Juan for the sake of his character, as well as because of his slight cough. He was a callow and rather affected youth. Soon he and Florrie set up a constant warfare of youthful sarcasm—and became the best of friends.

In the meantime, Virginia, though her practise had been constantly increasing, found that her supply of money dwindled more rapidly than the fees came in to replenish it. She also became worried over Florrie's interest in Jim Galloway.

ONE night a prospector was beaten and robbed by two men, one of whom he identified as Vidal Nunez; the other was suspected of being Kid Rickard. As Norton was searching for Nunez, he came across Galloway one day on a lonely trail.

"A fine place for a gun-fight," said the keeper of the Casa Blanca, coolly.

"If you think you can beat me to it—why, go ahead," retorted the sheriff.

But Galloway refused to fight, and tried to bribe Rod to give up his search for Nunez. Norton laughed at him.

"Very well, then," cried Galloway, "Vidal Nunez will be at the Casa Blanca to-night. Come and get him."

That night Cutter, Struve and Norton surrounded the Casa Blanca. Nunez, who had managed to sneak in through a window, warned Galloway that the men were outside.

"Let 'em come," cried the proprietor loudly.

"Coming, Galloway!"

Norton's ringing shout came back in answer. The door was flung open and on the threshold, a gun in each hand, stood the young sheriff.

Kid Rickard shot first. Jim Galloway and Norton opened fire on each other. A bullet smashed the swinging lamp. The fight went on in pitch darkness.

Then Struve, aiming his gun through the window, drove the outlaws into the street. Among them was Elmer Page, sick and dizzy.

Tom Cutter entered the room with a burning fagot. Kid Rickard lay under a table. Vidal Nunez was dead. Across his body was the still form of Rod Norton, the blood streaming from a wound in his close-cropped black hair.

CHAPTER XII

IGNACIO CHAVEZ, waiting to ask no questions, had raced away through the darkness to beat out a wild, thunderous alarm upon his bells. Later he would learn many were dead and would set the Captain mourning. But already had San Juan poured out her handful of citizens upon the street.

"Keep those men where they are," called Tom Cutter to Struve. "Every —— one of them; there'll be an answer wanted for tonight's work. Get a doctor, somebody; Patten or Miss Page."

Candles were brought; presently a lamp was found and set on the bar. The curious crowd began to desert Struve and his prisoners outside and to crowd about Cutter and the two forms lying still in the corner. Kid Rickard, cursing now and then, had dragged himself a little away and grew

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quiet, half-propped up against the wall. Struve, as the fire of faggots and grass began to burn low, commanded Galloway to lead the way back into the barroom and herded five other men after him, the shotgun promising a mutilated body to any man of them who sought to run for it.

"Nunez is dead," reported the deputy-sheriff, getting up from his knees. "Norton is alive and that's about all. A shot along the side of the head."

He turned slowly toward Galloway who, with steady hands and his face set in hard, inscrutable lines was pouring himself a generous glass of whisky.

"Looks like you'd got him, Jim," he said harshly, his eyes glittering. "And it looks like I'd got you. Where I want you, by God!"

Galloway drank his whisky and made no reply. He was thinking, thinking fast. His eyes were never still now but roved from Rod Norton's white face to the faces of Tom Cutter, Struve and the other men gathering in the room.

Borne upon one of the Casa Blanca's doors Norton was carried to Struve's hotel, the nearest place where an attempt could be made to care for him. Word came in that Virginia Page had been summoned upon one of her rare calls and was in Las Estrellas. Patten, however, was dressing and would be on hand in a moment. It was suggested that Kid Rickard, also, be carried to the hotel. But he himself asked to be left where he was until Patten came, and Cutter raised no objection. It was clear that the Kid was too badly hurt to so much as think of making an escape, were such his desire.

Galloway and Antone alone were put under arrest, the others merely advised to be on hand if they were wanted later. Galloway coolly demanded the charge against him.

"Resistin' an officer is as good as any right now," snapped Cutter.

As quiet claimed the town again Caleb Patten became the most important figure in San Juan. At such moments he seemed to swell visibly. He drove the curious from the room while he examined the unconscious sheriff and, when he had finished, merely shook his head, looked grave and refused to commit himself. He ordered Norton undressed and put to bed, went down the street to see Kid Rickard, probed the wound in the upper chest, ordered him to bed and returned to Norton at the hotel.

"Well?" asked John Engle who had arrived, talked with Struve and now looked anxiously to Patten.

Patten shrugged.

"Heavy-caliber bullet ripped along the side of his head," he said thoughtfully. "I am going to make a second examination now. Doubtless just the shock stunned him. That or striking his head as he pitched forward; there's another slight wound, a scalp-wound showing where his head hit as he fell."

A moment later Tom Cutter came in hastily, stood for a little staring with frowning, troubled eyes at the quiet form on the bed and went away, tugging at his lip, his frown deepening. He had his hands full tonight, had Tom Cutter, and no one but himself knew how he wanted Rod Norton to tell him just what to do, to show him the way to make no mistake. Leaving the room he had gone no further than the front door when he swung about and returned.

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Engle?" he asked.

Engle nodded and followed him silently. Out in the street, in the full light of Struve's porch-lamp, Cutter stopped, glancing about him to make sure that he was not overheard.

"You know all about the shooting of Brocky Lane up in the mountains," he said hurriedly. "Rod told me you did. Well, I just gathered in Moraga!"

"Moraga?" muttered Engle. "He has seen Galloway, then? And told him all about our knowing the rifles were cached in the old caves?"

"I found him at the Casa Blanca," said Cutter, the worried look in his eyes. "Somebody shot out the light when the mix-up started, you know. I've a notion it was Moraga. He was in one of the little card-rooms—putting on his shoes! I got his gun; he'd fired just one shot. The muzzle of it was bloody."

"If he has told Galloway——"

"But I don't believe he has. Struve says that just as Norton started things he saw a man run in from the cottonwoods and duck into the house. It was Struve's job to see that nobody got out and he let him go by. If it wasn't Moraga, who was it? And,

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when I grabbed him just now, the first thing he said was, 'I want to talk with Galloway.'"

"You didn't let him?" demanded Engle quickly.

"No. A couple of the boys have walked him off down the road. I've got Galloway and Antone cooling their heels in the jail. Now, what I want is some advice. What am I going to do with this job until Rod Norton comes to and takes a hand—if he ever does," he muttered heavily.

"It's clear that you've got to keep Moraga away from Galloway; if they haven't already had a chance to talk it's a pure God-send and it's up to you that they don't get that chance."

"Yes," admitted Cutter slowly. "But I'm the first man to admit that I'm all muggled up. What did Moraga have his shoes off for? If he shot out the light, why did he do it? And how'd he get blood on his gun?"

Engle shook his head.

"All questions for the district attorney later, Tom," he answered. "But, if you want any advice from me, here it is: get Moraga out of the way on the jump. He is supposed to be in jail in the next county; he must have broken out. Send a man to Las Palmas on the jump to telephone to Sheriff Roberts; send Moraga along with him. And, whatever you do, keep Jim Galloway where you've got him. I think we've got our case against him tonight."

"That's what I've been thinkin'. I guess that's what Norton would do, eh?"

"Sure of it," said Engle promptly. "Find out, if you can, whether Moraga got a chance to talk with Galloway. I'm going back to the house to let my wife and Florrie know what has happened. If you need me you know where I am. I'll either be there or at the hotel. With Rod, you know."

Engle went on to his home, told what had happened and, leaving his wife anxious, his daughter weeping hysterically, returned to the hotel.

"I've done all that any one could do for him," said Patten as though defending himself because of Norton's continued unconsciousness. "He's in pretty bad shape, Engle. Oh, I guess I can pull him through but at that it's going to be a close squeak. Lucky I was right on hand, though." And he grew technical, spoke of blood-pressures taken, of traumatism superinducing prolonged coma, of this and that which made no impression on the banker.

"You mentioned two wounds," Engle reminded him. "The one made by the bullet and another——"

"By his head striking as he fell? Yes; that would have completed the work of the first shock in knocking him unconscious. But it is a negligible affair now; a mere scalp wound that he wouldn't know anything about in the morning if it weren't for the lump that'll be there. And since the other injury, the long gouging cut made by the bullet, has just plowed along the outer surface of the skull I think that I can promise you he'll be all right pretty soon now. We ought to have some ice, but I've made cold compresses do."

Engle went again to look upon Norton. The sheriff lay as before, on his back, his limbs lax, his face deathly white, a bandage about his head. There rose a lump into the banker's throat as he turned away. For the thought had come to him that just so had Billy Norton lain, that Billy Norton had never regained consciousness—and that the blow then as now had been struck by Galloway or Galloway's man. And the sudden fear was upon him that Rod Norton was even more badly hurt than Caleb Patten admitted.

The fear did not lessen as the night drew on and finally brightened into another day. When the sun flared up out of the flatlands lying beyond Tecolote the wounded man at Struve's hotel lay as he had done all night giving no sign to tell whether he was life's or death's.

CHAPTER XIII

THE eyes of San Juan were upon Caleb Patten throughout the night and during the long hours of the following day. Under them his inflated ego grew further distended while, more technical than ever, he explained how it could be that a man in Rod Norton's condition could live and yet lie like a man dead. So prolific and involved were his medical phrases, in fact, that men like John Engle and Struve began to ask themselves if Patten understood his case.

When, after twelve hours, the wounded man awoke to a troubled consciousness Patten's relief was scarcely less visible than that

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of Norton's friends. Patten felt his prestige taking unto itself new wings and immediately grew more wisely verbose than ever. It was a rare privilege to have the most talked of and generally liked man of the community under his hands; it was wine to Patten's soul to have that man show signs of recovering under his skill.

So he drove well-wishers from the room, drew the shades, commanded quiet and came and went eternally, doing nothing whatever and appearing to be fighting, sleeves rolled up, for a threatened life. Long before noon there were those who had laughed at Patten who now accused themselves of having failed to do him justice.

Virginia Page had remained all night with her patient in Las Estrellas. The first rumor of the fight in the Casa Blanca to come to her was borne to her ears by Ignacio's bell as she rode back toward San Juan. Only a few hours ago she had talked with Galloway, watching him banter with Florrie Engle; but a little before that, earlier in the same day, she had seen Rod Norton. Before she galloped up to the old mission garden her heart was beating excitedly, and she was asking herself, a little fearfully—

"Is it Galloway or is it Rod Norton?"

For she was so sure that in the end Ignacio would ring the Captain for one of them.

Ignacio told her the story. Norton was lying in the hotel, near death, unconscious, Patten working over him; Jim Galloway and Antone were in the little jail and soon would be taken to the county seat; Kid Rickard was shot through the lung but would live, Patten said; Vidal Nunez, over whom the whole thing had started, was dead.

"If *mi amigo* Roderico die," mumbled Ignacio, "it will be two Nortones, two sheriffs, that die because of Galloway. If Roderico live, then the next time he will kill Galloway. You will see, *señorita*."

The fear about her heart had tightened. She made no answer as she rode slowly down the street. She was thinking how, only a few weeks ago, she had heard the bells ring for the first time, how then Galloway and Norton had been but meaningless names to her, how she had been little moved by either the rattle of pistol shots or the Captain's heavy tolling. Now things were different. Just in what were they "different" and to what degree? She could not answer her own question before she was at the hotel.

Struve came immediately, noted her pale face, attributed it to a sleepless night and made her take a cup of coffee. Dropping into a chair across the table from her he rounded out the information she already had from Ignacio. Norton was still unconscious though, only a few minutes ago, Patten had reported signs of an improvement. Mrs. Engle had been with him, was still there acting nurse; he was being given every attention possible.

Patten himself entered, drawn by the aroma of coffee. He nodded carelessly to the girl and remarked to Struve, with a flash of triumph in his eyes, that at last he had "brought him around." Norton was very weak, sick, dizzy, perhaps not yet out of danger. But Patten had won in the initial skirmish with old man Death.

At least, so Struve was given to feel. Virginia, with a quick look at Patten's complacent face, was moved with sudden, almost insistent longing, that Rod Norton's life might be given into her own hands rather than remain in the pudgy hands of a man she at once disliked as an individual and failed to admire as a physician. For she had needed no long residence in San Juan to form her own estimate of the man's ability—or lack of ability. But this plainly was Patten's case, not hers; she got up from the table and went into her own room.

Elmer she found lying fully-dressed upon a couch in her office, sleeping heavily. She stood over him a moment, her eyes tender; he was still, would always be, her baby brother. Then she went to her own bed in the adjoining room and threw herself down upon her bed, worn out, anxious, vaguely fearful for the future.

It was a long day for San Juan. Mrs. Engle came now and then into Virginia's room to wipe her eyes and force her hopeful smile; Florrie came like a young tempest to weep copiously and hyperbollically invest poor dear Roddy with all imaginable heroic attributes; Engle and Struve and Tom Cutter were grave-eyed and distressed. Every hour Ignacio came to the hotel to ask quietly how Roderico was doing.

And, in his own way, it appeared that Elmer Page was as worried as any one. It was long before he told Virginia that he had been in the Casa Blanca when the shooting occurred; haltingly he gave her his version of it.

"Don't you think, Elmer," suggested the

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girl somewhat wearily, "that you have gotten hold of the wrong end of things here? I mean in choosing your friends? Certainly after this you will have nothing to do with men like Galloway and Rickard?"

Ten minutes' talk with Elmer gave her a deeper understanding of his attitude than she had been able to guess until now. Spontaneously he had leaned toward Kid Rickard because the Kid was a "killer" and Elmer was a boy; in other words because young Page's imagination made of Rickard a truly picturesque figure. Since Rickard admired Jim Galloway as he had never known how to admire aught else that breathed and walked, Elmer's eyes had from the first rested approvingly upon the massive figure of Casa Blanca's owner.

That both Galloway and Rickard were fighting against persecution, were merely individuals wronged by the law and too fearlessly independent to submit to the high hand of sheriff or judge, was easily implanted in the boy's mind. Yesterday his fancies were ready to make heroes of Galloway and his crowd, to make of Norton a meddler hiding behind the bulwark of his office and hounding those who were too manly to step aside for him. And now Elmer was all at sea, no land in sight.

"A gun in each hand, sis," he cried warmly, his cheeks flushed, his eyes bright as the almost constantly recurring picture formed again in his memory. "And if you could have only seen his eyes! Talk about hiding behind anything—no sir! And him only one against Galloway and the Kid and Nunez and a whole roomful."

And here was Elmer's trouble drawn to the surface; he was touched with leaping admiration for the man who lay now in the darkened room, he couldn't admire both Norton, the sheriff, and Galloway and Rickard, the sheriff's sworn enemies! Which way should Elmer Page turn? Virginia very wisely held her tongue.

TOM CUTTER, having conferred with Engle and Struve, left San Juan in the early afternoon, convoying his prisoners to the greater security of the county jail. It seemed the wisest step, the thing which Norton would have done. Besides, Galloway insisted upon it and upon being allowed to send a man to the railroad instructed to send a telegram to Galloway's lawyer.

"I am willing to stand trial," said Galloway indifferently. "I'll arrange for bail tomorrow and be back here."

The question which Tom Cutter, Struve and Engle all asked of themselves and of each other, "Did Moraga get the chance to talk with Galloway?" went unanswered. There was nothing to do but wait upon the future to know that; unless Moraga, now on his way back to Sheriff Roberts could be made to talk. And Moraga was not given to garrulity.

Meantime Patten brought hourly reports of Norton. He was still in danger to be sure; but he was doing as well as could be expected, even hoped for. No one must go into the room saving Patten, of course, and Mrs. Engle to assist him. Norton was fully conscious but forbidden by Patten to talk; he recognized those about him, his eyes were clear, his temperature satisfactory, his strength no longer waning. He had partaken of a bit of nourishment and tomorrow, if there were no unlooked-for complications, would be able to speak with Engle for whom he had asked.

During the days which followed, days in which Rod Norton lay quiet in a darkened room, Virginia Page was conscious of having awakened some form of interest in Caleb Patten. His eyes followed her when she came and went and, when she surprised them, were withdrawn swiftly but not before she had seen in them a speculative thoughtfulness. While she noted this she gave it little thought, so occupied was her mind with other matters. She had postponed as long as she could a talk with Julius Struve, her spirit galled that she must in the end go to him "like a beggar" as she expressed it to herself. But one day, her head erect, she followed the hotel-keeper into his office. In the hallway she encountered Patten.

"May I have a word with you?" Patten asked, seeking to stop her.

But Virginia had steeled herself to the interview with Struve and would no longer set it aside, even for a moment.

"If you care to wait on the veranda," she told Patten, "I'll be out in a minute. I want to see Mr. Struve now."

Patten stood aside and watched her pass on, the shrewdly questioning look in his eyes. When she disappeared in the office he remained where she had left him, listening. When she began to speak with Struve, her

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voice rapid and hinting at nervousness, he even came a quiet step nearer the door she had closed after her.

"I am ashamed of myself, Mr. Struve," said Virginia, coming straight to the point. "I owe you already for a month's board and room rent for myself and Elmer. I——"

"That's perfectly all right, Miss Virginia," said Struve hurriedly. "I know the sort of job you've got on your hands making collections. If you can wait I am willing to do so. Glad to do so, in fact."

Patten, fingering his little mustache, then letting his thick fingers drop to the diamond in his tie, smiled with evident satisfaction. Then he tiptoed down the hall and went out upon the veranda where he smoked his cigar and looked about him serenely.

When Virginia came out to him her face was flaming. Had he not heard Struve's words he would have thought that his answer to her apology had been an angry demand for immediate payment. Patten failed to understand how the girl's fine, independent nature writhed in a situation new to her and all but intolerable. That she appreciated Struve's quick kindness did not minimize her own mortification.

Patten watched her seat herself; then he launched himself into his subject. Virginia listened at first with faint interest, then with quickened wonder. For the life of her she could not tell if the little man were seeking to flatter or insult her.

"I have leased an old, deserted ranch-house a mile or so out," he told her. "Got it for a song, too. Some first-rate land goes with it; I'll probably buy the whole thing before long. There's plenty of good water. Now, what am I up to, eh? Just the same thing all the time, if you want to know. And that means making money."

Leaning forward he knocked the ash from his cigar and with the movement of his body brought himself confidentially nearer.

"An open-air sanatorium," he announced triumphantly. "For tuberculosis patients. There are lots of them," and he waved his arm in a wide embracing half-circle, "coming out of the East on the run, scared to death, scattered up and down—and with more or less money in their pockets. It's a big proposition, a sure money-getter."

He grew as animated as she had ever dreamed he could be as he sketched his plans. While she was wondering why he had come to her with them he gave his explanation. And he made her his double offer. Then it was that she was puzzled to know whether he meant to compliment her or merely to insult her.

In a word he assured her from the heights of superiority to which he had ascended these last few days of importance, doctoring was no woman's work at best; certainly not in a land like this where a man's endurance, breadth of mind, keener innate ability to cope with big situations were indicated. No work for a slip of a girl like Virginia Page. Of that Caleb Patten assured her unhesitatingly.

But there was work for such as her and in a place which he would create for her. Fairly bewildered at his audacity she found herself listening to his suggestion that she marry Caleb Patten and become a sort of head nurse in an institution which he would found!

In spite of her she was moved to sudden, impulsive laughter. She had not meant to laugh at the man who might be sincere, who, it was possible, was merely a fool. But laugh she did so that her mirth reached Rod Norton where he lay upon his bed and made him stir restlessly.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Patten, a flush in his cheeks.

"I mean," stammered Virginia at last, "that I thank you very much, Dr. Patten, but that I can avail myself of neither the opportunity of being your wife nor your head nurse. As for my inability to do for myself what I have set out to accomplish—well, I am not afraid yet. There is work to be done here and I don't quite agree with you that it's all man's work. There's always a little left over for a woman, you know," she added lightly.

But Patten was obviously angered. He flung to his feet and glared down at her. Perhaps it had not entered his thought that she could make other than the answer he wanted; it had been very clear to him that he was offering to become responsible for one who was embarked upon a voyage already destined to failure, that he would support her, merely doing as many other men of his ilk did and make her work for all that she got.

"It's silly nonsense, your thinking you can make a living here," he snapped irritably. "I'm already established, I'm a man, I can have all of the cases I want, you'll get only a few breeds who haven't

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a dollar to the dozen of them. If you are already broke and can't even pay for your room and board——"

"Who told you that?" she asked quickly.

"I can hear, can't I?" he demanded coarsely. "Didn't you go just now to beg Struve to hold you over? And——"

She slipped out of her chair, stood a moment staring coldly and contemptuously at him. Then she was gone, Patten watching her departure half-incredulously.

"A man who hasn't any more sense than Caleb Patten," she cried within herself, "has no business with a physician's license. It's a sheer wonder he didn't kill Roderick Norton!"

Already she had forgotten her words with Struve, or rather the matter for the present was shoved aside in her mind by another. She had come here to make good, she had her fight before her and she was going to make good. She had to—for herself, for her own pride, for Elmer's sake. And, finding Elmer, she made him sit down and listen to her while she sketched actual conditions briefly and emphatically.

He was old enough to do something for himself in the world, he was strong enough, continued idleness did him no earthly good and might do him no end of harm morally, mentally and physically. He had been her baby brother long enough; it was time that he became a man. She had supported him until now asking nothing of him in return save that he kept out of mischief a certain percentage of the time. Now he was going to work and help out. He could go to John Engle and get something to do upon one of Engle's ranches. Mr. Engle would be glad to offer him something.

Somewhat to her surprise Elmer responded eagerly. He had been thinking the matter over for some time and it appealed to him.

What he did not tell her was that he had seen some of the vaqueros riding in from one of the outlying ranges, lean, brown, quick-eyed men, who bestrode high-headed mounts and who wore spurs, wide hats, shaggy chaps and who perhaps carried revolvers hidden away in their hip-pockets, men who drank freely, spent their money as freely at dice and cards and who, all in all, were a picturesque crowd. Elmer took up his hat and went down to the bank and had a talk with John Engle. Virginia's eyes followed him hopefully.

THAT day Norton was allowed for the first time to receive callers. He had his talk with Engle, limited to five minutes by Patten who hung about curiously until Norton said pointedly that he wanted to speak privately with the banker. Later Florrie came with her mother, bringing an immense armful of roses culled by her own hands, excited, earnest, entering the shaded room like a frightened child, speaking only in hushed whispers.

"Won't you come in, too, for a moment, Virginia?" asked Mrs. Engle. "Roddy will be glad to see you; he has asked about you."

But Virginia made an excuse; it was Patten's case and after what had occurred between herself and Patten she had no intention of so much as seeming to overstep the professional lines.

The following day, however, she did go to see him. Patten himself, stiff and boorish, asked her to. His patient had asked for her several times, knowing that she was in the building and marking how she made an exception and refused to look in on him while all of his other friends were doing so, some of them coming many miles. Patten told her that Norton was not well by any means yet and that he did not intend to have him worried up over an imagined slight. So Virginia did as she was bid.

Mrs. Engle was in the room, bending over the bed with a dampened towel to lay upon Norton's forehead; he showed a sign of fever and his head ached constantly. He looked about quickly as the girl came in, his hand stirring a little, offering itself. She took it by way of greeting and sat down in the chair drawn up at his side.

"It's good of you to come!" he said quickly, his eyes brightening. "I was beginning to wonder if I had offended you in some way? You see, everybody has run in but you and—a man gets spoiled when he's laid up like this, doesn't he? Especially when it's the first time he can remember that he has stuck in bed for upward of twenty-four hours running."

Despite her familiarity with the swift ravages of illness she received a positive shock as she looked at him; she had visualized him during these latter days as she had last seen him, brown, vitally robust, the embodiment of lean, clean strength. Now sunless inaction had set its mark in his skin which had already grown sallow; his eyes

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burned into her own, his hand fell weakly to the coverlet as she removed her own, his fingers plucking nervously. And yet she summoned a cheerful smile to answer his.

"I was satisfied just to hear that you were doing well," she said. "And I know that the fewer people a sick man sees the better for him."

He moved his head restlessly back and forth on his pillow.

"Not for a man like me," he told her. "I'm not used to this sort of business. Just lying here with my eyes shut or staring at the ceiling, which is worse, drives a man mad. I told Patten today that if he didn't let me see folks I'd get up and go out if I had to crawl."

Virginia laughed, determined to be cheerful while she felt that she could cry, the weakness of a strong man affecting her peculiarly.

"I am afraid that you make a rather troublesome patient, don't you?" she asked lightly.

Norton made no answer but lay motionless save for the constant plucking at his coverlet, his eyes moodily fixed upon the wall. Mrs. Engle, finding the water-pitcher empty and saying that she would be back in two seconds, went out to fill it. Promptly Norton's eyes came back to Virginia's face, resting there steadily.

"I've been dizzy and sick and half out of my head a whole lot," he said abruptly. "I've been thinking of you most of the time, dreaming about you, climbing cliffs with you——"

He broke off suddenly but did not remove his eyes from hers. It was she who turned away, pretending to find it necessary to adjust the window curtain. For it was impossible for a girl to sit quietly while he looked at her that way, his eyes all without warning filling with a look for any girl to read, a look of glowing admiration, almost a look of pure love-making. Norton sighed and again his head moved restlessly on his pillow.

"I've had time to think here of late," he said after a little. "More time to think than I've ever had before in my life. About everything; myself and Jim Galloway and you. I have decided to send word to the district attorney to let Galloway go," he added, again watching her. "I am not going to appear against him and there's no case if I don't."

"But ——" she began, wondering.

"There are no buts about it. Suppose I can get him convicted, which I doubt; he'd get a light sentence, would appeal, at most would be out of the way a couple of years or so. And then it would all be to do over again. No; I want him out in the open, where he can go as far as he wants to go. And then——"

She saw how his body stiffened, how he braced himself as he lay, his feet against the footboard.

"We won't talk shop," she said gently. "It isn't good for you. Don't think about such things any more than you have to."

"I've got to think about something," he said impatiently. "Can I think about you?"

"Why not?" she answered as lightly as she had spoken before.

"Maybe that isn't good for me either," he answered.

"Nonsense. It's always good for us to think about our friends."

His eyes had wandered from hers, rested a moment upon the little table near his bed-head, came back to hers, narrowing a little.

"Will you set a chair against that window-shade?" he asked. "The light at the side hurts my eyes."

It was a natural request and she turned naturally to do what he asked. But, even with her back turned, she knew that he had reached out swiftly for something that lay on the table, that he had thrust it out of sight under his pillow.

Mrs. Engle came in and Virginia, staying another minute, said good-by and went out. As she went she glanced down at the table, and out in the hall and in her room she asked herself what it was that he had snatched out of her sight. It seemed a strange thing to do and the question perplexed her; while she attached no importance to it it was there like a pebble in one's shoe, refusing to be ignored.

That night, just as she was going to sleep, she knew. Out of a half-doze she had visualized the table with its couple of bottles, a withering rose, a scrap of note-paper, a fountain-pen. The pen—it was Patten's—had evidently leaked and had been wiped carelessly upon the sheet of paper, left lying with the paper half-wrapped around it. She had noted that while she sat by the bed, had even seen a few rudely scrawled words in Patten's slovenly

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hand. And she knew that it had been removed when she left the room. Removed by a hand which, in its haste, had slipped the pen with it under the pillow.

She went to sleep incensed with herself that she gave the matter another thought. But, in spite of her wish, she kept asking herself what it was that Patten had set down on paper which Roderick Norton did not want her to read.

CHAPTER XIV

"I AM a free man, if you please." The sheriff stood in the hotel doorway, looking down upon her as she sat in her favorite chair at the end of the veranda. "I have given my keeper his fee and sent him away. May I come out and sit down and watch you while you read?"

Virginia closed her book upon her knee and gave him a smile by way of welcome. He looked unusually tall as he stood in the broad, low entrance; his ten days of sickness and inactivity had made him gaunt, haggard and pale.

"I shouldn't be reading at this time of day, anyway," she said. "I hadn't noticed that the sun was down. Good to be what you call free again, isn't it?"

He laughed softly, put back his head, filled his lungs. And then he came on to her and stood leaning against the wall, his hat cocked over one side to hide the bandage.

"The world is good," he announced with gay positiveness. "Especially when you've been away from it for a spell and weren't quite sure what was next. And especially, too, when you've had time to think. Did you ever take a week off and just do nothing but think?"

"One doesn't have time for that sort of thing as a rule," she admitted. "There's a chair standing empty if you care to let me in on your deductions."

"I don't want to sit down or lie down until I'm ready to drop," he grinned down at her. "A bed makes me sick at my stomach and a chair is pretty nearly as bad. I'd like almighty well to get a horse between my knees—and ride! Suppose I'd fall to pieces if I tried it right now?"

"Sure of it. And not so sure that you haven't discharged your keeper prematurely. You mustn't think of such things ——"

"There you go. Forbidding me to think again! Believe I will sit down; would you believe that a full-grown man like me could get as weak as a cat this quick?"

He took the chair just beyond her, tilted it back against the hotel wall, his booted heels caught under its elevated legs and glanced away from her to the riot of colors staining the sky above San Juan's scattered houses in the west.

"Yes, sir," he continued in his train of thought, "I'd like a horse between my knees; I'd like to ride out yonder into the sunset, to meet the night as it comes down; I'd like the feeling of nothing but the stars over me instead of the smothery roof of a house. Doesn't it appeal to you, too?"

"Yes," she said.

"You on Persis, me on my big roan, riding not as we rode that other night but just for the fun of it. I'd like to ride like the devil — you don't mind my saying what I mean, do you?—to go scooting across the sage brush letting out a yell at every jump, boring holes in the night with my gun, making all of the racket and dust that one man can make. Ever feel that way? Just like getting outside and making a noise? Let me talk! I'm the one who has been shut up for so long my tongue has started to grow fast to the inside of my mouth.

"At first I could do nothing but lie flat on my back in a sort of fog, seeing nothing clearly, thinking not at all. Then came the hours in which I could do nothing but think, under orders to keep still. Think? Why, I thought about everything that ever happened, most things that might happen and a whole lot that never will. Now comes the third stage; I can talk better than I can walk. Do you mind listening while a man raves?"

"Not in the least."

She found his mood contagious and, smiling in that quick, bright way natural to her, showed for a moment the twin dimples of which together with a host of other things he had had ample time to think during his bedroom imprisonment.

"Please rave on."

"In due course," he mused, "the fourth stage will arrive and I can be doing something besides talk, can't I? Now let me tell you about the King's Palace."

"You begin well——"

"The King's Palace is where we are going on our first outing. That was decided three days ago at four minutes after 6 A.M. You

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and I and, if you like, Florrie and your kid brother. We'll ride out there in the very early morning, in the saddle before the stars are gone. We'll lunch and loaf there all day. We'll ride home in the dusk and the dark. For lunch we will have bacon and coffee, cooked over a fire in one of the palace anterooms. We will have some trout, fried in the bacon grease, trout whipped out of the likeliest mountain stream you ever saw or heard about. We will have cheese, perhaps, and maybe a box of candy for dessert."

"The King's Palace?" she asked, curiously. "I never heard of such a place. Are you making it all up?"

"Not a bit of it. It's all that's left of some of the old ruins of the same folk who lived in the caves up on the cliffs. Do you know why I am bound to get Jim Galloway's tag soon or late?"

Her mind with his had touched upon the hidden rifles and the abrupt digression was no digression to her, reached by the span of suggestion.

"Because he is in the wrong and you are in the right; or, in other words, because he opposes the law and you represent it."

"Because he plays the game wrong! Some more results of a long week of nothing to do but think things out. There is just one way for a law-breaker to operate if he means to get away with it."

"You mean that a man can get away with it? Surely not for good?"

But he nodded thoughtfully at the slowly fading strata of shaded colors splashed across the western sky.

"A man can get away with it for keeps—if he plays the game right. Jim Galloway isn't that man and so I'll get him. He has ignored the first necessary principle. Which is the lone hand."

"You mean he takes men into his confidence——"

"And he goes on and ignores the second necessary principle; a man must stop short of murder. Let him be a gang-man, let him be a killer, and he ties his own rope around his neck. If a man like Galloway, a man with brains, power, without fear, without scruple, should decide to loot this corner of the world or any other corner, and set about it right, playing the lone hand invariably, he would be a man I couldn't bring in in a thousand years. But Galloway has slipped up; he has too many Moragas and Antones and Vidals at his heels; he has been the cause, directly or indirectly, of too many killings. A theft will be forgotten in time, the hue and cry die down; spilled blood cries to Heaven after ten years."

"Galloway is back in San Juan——"

"I know. I wanted him back. I wanted him free and unhampered. He'll be bolder than ever now, won't he, if this case is dropped? He's come out a little into the open already; he'll be tempted out a little further. There'll be more of his work soon, a robbery here or there, and he will grow so sure of himself that he'll grow careless. Then——"

"But have you the right?" she asked quickly. "Knowing him a law-breaker, have you the right to allow him to go further and further, just because in the end you hope to get him?"

He met her look with a smile which puzzled her.

"I'll answer your question when you define right and wrong for me," he said quietly.

THEY grew silent together, watching the gradual sinking of day into twilight and early dusk. Norton, for all his vaunted ravings had grown thoughtful; Virginia, turning her eyes toward him while his were staring out beyond the house-tops, saw in them a look of deep, frowning speculation. And through this look, like a little fire gleaming through a fog, was another look whose meaning baffled her.

"What do you think of Patten?" he asked.

Startled by his abruptness, characteristic of him though it was today, she asked in puzzled fashion——

"What do you mean?"

"Not as a man," he said, withdrawing his gaze from the sunset and bestowing it gravely upon her. "As a physician. Do you size him up as capable or as something of a quack?"

She hesitated. But finally she made the only reply possible.

"Of course you don't expect any answer, knowing that you should not come to one member of a profession for an estimate of another. And, besides, you know that I know nothing whatever of Dr. Patten, either as a man or as a physician."

He laughed softly.

"Hedging, pure, unadulterated hedging! I didn't look for that from you. Shall I

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tell you what we both think of him? He is a farce and a fake and I rather think that I am going to run him out of the State pretty soon. What would you say of a doctor who couldn't tell the difference between a wound made by a man bumping his head when he fell and by a smashing blow with a gun-barrel? Patten doesn't guess yet that it was the blow Moraga gave me the other night which came so close to ringing down the sable curtains for me."

"Moraga?" she asked with quickened interest. "Not the same Moraga who shot Brocky Lane?"

"The same little old Moraga," he assured her lightly. "You needn't mention it abroad, of course; I don't think Galloway got a chance to talk with him and we are not sure yet that he even knows Moraga was here. But I know somebody put me out in the dark by hammering me over the head; and Tom Cutter found blood on Moraga's revolver. But we wander far afield. Coming back to Patten, do we agree that he is something of a dub?"

"I'd rather not discuss him."

"Exactly. And I, being in the talkative way, am going to tell you that he has made blunders before now, that at least one man died under his nice little fat hands who shouldn't have died outside of jail, that long ago I had my suspicions and began instituting inquiries, that I am fully prepared to learn that Caleb Patten has no more right to an M. D. after his name than I have."

"You must be mistaken—I hope you are. Men used to do that sort of thing but under existing laws——"

"Under existing laws men do a good many things in and about San Juan which they shouldn't do. I have found out that there was a Caleb Patten who was a young doctor; that there was a Charles Patten, his brother, who was a young scamp; that they both lived in Baltimore a few years ago; that from Baltimore they both went hastily no man knows where. This gentleman whom we have with us might be either one of them. Here comes Ignacio. *Que hay*, Ignacio!"

"*Que hay*, Roderico," responded Ignacio, coming to lean languidly against the veranda post.

He removed his hat elaborately, his liquid eyes doing justice to Virginia's dainty charm.

"*Buenas tardes*, Señorita," he greeted her.

"What is new, Ignacio?" queried Norton. "No bells for you to ring for the last ten days! You grow fat in idleness, *amigo mio*."

Ignacio sighed and rolled his cigaret.

"What is new, you ask? No? *Bueno*, this is new!" He lifted his eyes suddenly and they were sparkling as with suppressed excitement. "The devil himself has made a visit to San Juan. *Si, señor; si, señorita.* It is so."

Virginia smiled; Norton gravely asked the explanation. Why should his satanic majesty come to San Juan?

"Why? *Quien sabe?*" Ignacio shrugged all responsibility from his lazy shoulders. "But he came and more will come from his visit, more and more of evil things. One knows. *Seguro que si;* one knows. But I will tell you and the señorita; no one else knows of it. It was while in the Casa Blanca men are shooting, while Roderico Nortone will make his arrest of poor Vidal who is dead now."

He crossed himself and drew a thoughtful puff from his cigaret.

"I run fast to ring the bells. I come into the garden and it is dark. I come under the bells. And while my hand can not find the rope— *Si, señor y señorita*—before I touch the rope—the Captain begins to ring! Just a little; not long; low and quiet and—angry! And then he stop and I shiver. It is hard not to run out of the garden. But I cross myself and find the ropes and make all the bells dance. But I know; it was the devil who was before me."

CHAPTER XV

NOT only was Galloway back in San Juan but, as Norton had predicted of him, he appeared to have every assurance that he stood in no unusual danger. There had been a fight in a dark room and one man had been killed, certain others wounded. The dead man was Galloway's friend, hence it was not to be thought that Galloway had killed him. Kid Rickard was another friend. As for the wound Rod Norton had received, who could swear that this man or that had given it to him?

"The chances are," Galloway had already said in many quarters, "that Tom Cutter, getting excited, popped over his own sheriff."

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True, it was quite obvious that a charge lay at Galloway's door, that of harboring a fugitive from justice, that of resisting an officer. But with Galloway's money and influence, with the shrewdest technical lawyer in the State retained, with ample perjured testimony to be had as desired, the law-breaker saw no reason for present uneasiness. Perhaps more than anything else he regretted the death of Vidal Nunez and the wounding of Kid Rickard. For these matters vitally touched Jim Galloway and his swollen prestige among his henchmen; he had thrown the cloak of his protection about Vidal, had summoned him, promised him all safety—and Vidal was dead.

He knew that men spoke of this over and over and hushed when he came upon them; that Vidal's brother, Pete, grumbled and muttered that Galloway was losing his grip, that soon or late he would fall, that falling he would drag others down with him. More than ever before the whole county watched for the final duel between Galloway and Norton. In half a dozen small towns and mining camps men laid bets upon the result.

For the first time, also, barbed comment began to swell into positive criticism of the sheriff. He had gotten this man and that, it was true. And yet, after all of this time, he seemed to be no nearer than at the beginning to getting the man who counted. There were those who recalled the killing of Bisbee of Las Palmas and reminded others that there had been no attempt at prosecution. Now there had come forth from the Casa Blanca fresh fruit of defiance and lawlessness and still Jim Galloway came and went as he pleased. Those who criticised said that Norton was losing his nerve, or else that he was merely incompetent when measured by the yard-stick of swift, incisive action wedded to capability.

"If he can't get Jim Galloway let him step out of the way and give the chance to a man who can," was said many times and in many ways. Even John Engle, Julius Struve, Tom Cutter and Brocky Lane came to Norton at one time or another, telling him what they had heard, urging him to give some heed to popular clamor and to begin legal action.

"Put the skids under him, Roddy," pleaded Brocky Lane. "We can't slide him far the first trip, maybe. But a year or so in jail will break his grip here."

But Norton shook his head. He was playing the game his way.

"The rifles are still in the cache," he told Brocky. "He is getting ready as we know; further, just as my friends are beginning to find fault with me, so are his hangers on beginning to wonder if they haven't tied to the wrong man. Just to save his own face he'll have to start something pretty pronto. And we know about where he is going to strike. It's up to us to hold our horses, Brocky."

Brocky growled a bit but went away more than half-persuaded. He called at the hotel, paid his respects to Virginia and, affording her a satisfaction which it was hard for her to conceal, also paid her for her services rendered him in the cliff-dweller's cave.

Often enough the man who tilts with the law is in most things not unlike his fellows, different alone perhaps in the one essential that he is born a few hundreds of years late in the advance of civilization. Going about that part of his business which has its claims to legitimacy, mingling freely with his fellows, he fails to stand out distinctly from them as a monster. Given the slow passing of uneventful time and it becomes harder and harder to consider him as a social menace.

When the man is of the Jim Galloway type, his plans large, his patience long, he may even pass out from the shadow of a gallows-tree and return to occupy his former place in the quiet community life while his neighbors are prone to forget or condone.

As other days came and slipped by and the weeks grew out of them Galloway's was a pleasant, untroubled face to be seen on the street, at the post-office, behind his own bar, on the country roads. He ignored any animosity which San Juan might feel for him. If a man looked at him stonily, Galloway did not care to let it be seen that he saw; if a woman turned out to avoid him no evidence that he understood darkened his eyes.

He had a good-humored word to speak always; he lifted his hat to the banker's wife as he had always done; he mingled with the crowd when there were "exercises" at the little school-house; he warmly congratulated Miss Porter, the crabbed old-maid teacher, on the work she had accomplished and made her wonder fleetingly if there wasn't a bit of good in the man after all. Perhaps there was; there is in most men. And Florrie Engle was beginning to wonder the same thing.

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For Rod Norton, recovered and about his duties, was not quite the same touchingly heroic figure he had been while lying unconscious and in danger of his life. And it was no part of Florrie Engle's nature to remain long either upon the heights or in the depths of an emotion. That night she had cried out passionately against Galloway; as days went their placid way and she saw Galloway upon each one of them—and did not see a great deal of Norton who was either away or monopolizing Virginia—she took the first step in the gambler's direction by beginning to be sorry for him.

First, it was too bad that Mr. Galloway did the sort of things which he did; no doubt he had had no mother to teach him when he was very young. Next, it was a shame that he was blamed for everything that had to happen; maybe he was a—a bad-man, but Florrie simply didn't believe he was responsible for half of the deeds laid at his door. Finally, through a long and intricate chain of considerations, the girl came to the point where she nodded in return for Galloway's lifted hat. The smile in the man's eyes was one of pure triumph.

"Oh, my dear!" Florrie burst into Virginia's room, flushed and palpitant with her latest emotion. "He has told me all about it, and do you know, I don't believe that we have the right to blame him? Doesn't it say in the Bible or—or somewhere, that greater praise or something shall no man have than he who gives his life for a friend? It's something like that, anyway. Aren't people just horrid, always blaming other people, never stopping to consider their reasons and impulses and looking at it from their side? Vidal Nunez was a friend of Mr. Galloway's; he was in Mr. Galloway's house. Of course——"

"I thought that you didn't speak to him any more."

"I didn't for a long time. But if you could have only seen the way he always looks at me when I bump into him. Virgie, I believe he is sad and lonely and that he would like to be good if people would only give him a chance. Why, he is human after all, you know."

Virginia began to ask herself if Galloway were merely amusing himself with Florrie or if the man were really interested in her. It did not seem likely that a girl like Florrie would appeal to a man like him; and yet, why not? There is at least a grain of truth, if no more, in the old saw of the attraction of opposites. And it was scarcely more improbable that he should be interested in her than that she should allow herself to be ever so slightly moved by him. And furthermore, in its final analysis, emotion is not to be explained.

VIRGINIA set herself the task of watching for any slightest development of the man's influence over the girl. She saw Florrie almost daily, either at the hotel to which Florrie had acquired the habit of coming in the cool of the afternoons, or at the Engle home. And, for the sake of her little friend and at the same time for Elmer's sake, she threw the two youngsters together as much as possible. They quarreled rather a good deal, criticised each other with startling frankness and grew to be better friends than either realized.

Elmer was a vacquero now, as he explained whenever need be or opportunity arose, wore chaps, a knotted handkerchief about a throat which daily grew more brown, spurs as large and noisy as were to be encountered on San Juan's street, and his right hip-pocket bulged. None of the details escaped Florrie's eyes—he called her "Fluff" now and she nicknamed him "Black Bill"—and she never failed to refer to them mockingly.

"They tell me, Black Bill," she said innocently, "that you fell off your horse yesterday. I was so sorry."

She had offered her sympathy during a lull in the conversation, drawing the attention of her father, mother and Virginia to Elmer, whose face reddened promptly.

"Florrie!" chided Mrs. Engle, hiding the twinkle in her own eyes.

"Oh, her," said Elmer, with a wave of the hand. "I don't mind what Fluff says. She's just trying to kid me."

And, toward the end of the evening, having been thoughtful for ten minutes, Elmer adopted Florrie's tactics and remarked suddenly and in a voice to be heard much further than his needed to carry:

"Say, Fluff, saw an old friend of yours th' other day." And when Florrie, "gun-shy" as Elmer called her, was too wise to ask any questions, he hastened on: "Juanito Miranda, it was. Sent his best. So did Mrs. Juanito."

Whereupon it was Florrie's turn to go a

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scarlet of mortification and anger. For Juanito had soft black eyes and almost equally soft black mustaches and only a year ago Florrie had been busied making a hero of him when he, the blind one, took unto himself an Indian bride and in all innocence heaped shame high upon the blonde head. How Elmer unearthed such ancient history was a mystery to Florrie; but none the less she "hated" him for it.

They saw a very great deal of each other, each serving the purpose of a sort of balance wheel to the other's self-centered interest. Perhaps the one subject upon which they could agree was Jim Galloway; Elmer still liked to look upon the gambler as a colossal figure standing serene among wolves, while Florrie could admit to him with no fear of a chiding, that she thought Mr. Galloway "simply splendid!"

When one evening, after having failed to show himself for a full month, Rod Norton came to the Engles', found Elmer and Virginia there and suggested the ride to the King's Palace he stirred up no end of enthusiasm. Elmer had a day off, thanks to the generosity of his employer, Mr. Engle, and had just secretly purchased a fresh outfit consisting of a silver-mounted Spanish bit, a new pair of white and unspeakably shaggy, draggy chaps, a wide hat with a band of snake hide, and boots that were the final whisper in high-heeled discomfort.

Florrie disappeared into her own room to make her own little riding-costume as irresistible as possible. They were to start with the first streaks of dawn tomorrow, just the four of them, since the banker and his wife, lukewarmly invited, had no desire for a forty-mile ride between morning and night.

It was Rod Norton's privilege to lead his merry party into what for them was a wonderland, nothing less. Even Florrie, though so much of her life had been passed in San Juan, had never before visited the King's Palace. Clattering through the street while most folk were asleep they took advantage of the cool of the dawn and were a mile out toward the mountains while yet coffee and eggs hastily taken were a pleasant memory.

Elmer and Florrie racing on ahead laid aside their accustomed weapons and were, for the once, utterly flattering. Each wishing to be admired, admired the other and was paid back with the hoped-for coin. Norton and Virginia, at first a little inclined toward silence, soon grew as noisily merry as the others, drawing deep enjoyment from the moment.

And, at the portals of the King's Palace, reached after four hours in the saddle, followed by thirty minutes on foot, they stood hushed with wonder. They were high upon the southern slope of Mt. Temple, had come abruptly into the unexpected. Here a rugged plateau had caught and held through the ages the soil which had weathered down from the cliffs above; here were trees to replace the weary gray brush, shade instead of glare, birds as welcome substitutes for droning insects, water and flowers to make the cañons doubly cool and fragrant for him who had ascended from the dry reaches of sand below the talus.

"It's just like fairyland!" cried the ecstatic Florrie. "Roddy Norton, I think you're real mean not to have brought me here ages ago!"

"Ages ago, my dear miss," laughed Norton, "you were too little to appreciate it. You should thank me for bringing you now."

Down through the middle of the plateau ran the purling stream which sprang from undying sources higher up and which was destined to yield to sun and thirsty earth long before it twisted down the lower slopes of the hills. Along its edges the grass was thick and rich, shot through everywhere with little blue blossoms and the golden gleam of the star-flowers. Further promise of yellow beauty was given by the stalks of the evening primrose scattered everywhere, the flowers now, sleeping. In the groves were pines, small cedars and a sprinkling of sturdy dwarf oaks. And from their shelter came the welcome sound of a bird's twitter.

"It's always about as you see it," Norton explained. "Too hard to get to, too small when one makes the climb to afford enough pasturage for sheep. And now the palace itself."

Straight ahead the cliffs overhung the further rim of the plateau. And there, under the outjutting roof of rock, an ancient people had fashioned themselves a home which stood now as when their hands laboriously set it there. The protected ledge which afforded eternal foundation was slightly above the plateau's level, to be reached by a series of "steps" in the rock, steps which were holes worn deep perhaps five hundred years ago. The climb was

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steep, hazardous unless one went with due precaution, but the four holiday-makers hurried to begin it.

So close to the edge of the rock ledge did the walls of the ruin stand that there was barely room to edge along it, coming to the narrow doorway. Holding hands, Norton in the lead, Elmer in the rear, they made their breathless way. And then they were in the hushed, shaded anteroom.

THE dust of untroubled ages lay upon the surprisingly smooth floor. Walls of cemented rock rose intact on two sides, broken here and there on a third while the cliff itself made the fourth at the rear. And unusually spacious, wide and high-ceiled was this room which may have had its use when time was younger as a council-chamber. At one end was another door, small and dark and forbidding, leading to another room. And beyond lay other quarters, a long line of them which might have housed scores in their time.

While Florrie, letting out little shrieks now and then interspersed with gay cries of delight, led a half-timorous way and Elmer went with her upon the tour of discovery, Virginia and Norton stood a moment at the front entrance looking down upon the fertile plateau and across it to the level miles running out to San Juan and beyond.

"Who were they?" asked Virginia, unconscious of a half-sigh as she withdrew abstracted eyes from the wide panorama which had filled the vision of so many other men and women and little children before the white man came to claim the new world. "They who builded here and lived and died here. What has become of them? Where did they go?"

"All questions asked a thousand times and never answered. I don't know. But they were good builders, good engineers, good pottery-makers, good farmers and hunters and fighters; rather a goodly crowd, I take it. Come, and I'll share my secret with you while Florrie and Elmer discover the skeleton a little further on and stop to exclaim over it."

Norton's secret was a hidden room of the King's Palace. While many men knew of the palace itself he believed that none other than himself had ever ferreted out this particular chamber which he called the treasure chamber. It was to be reached by clambering through an orifice of the eastern wall, over a clutter of fallen blocks of stone and a score of feet along the narrowing ledge. Just before they came to the point where the encroaching wall of cliff denied further foothold they found a fissure in the rock itself wide enough to allow them to slip into it.

Again they climbed, coming presently to a ledge smaller than the one below and hidden by an outthrust boulder. Here was the last of the rooms of the King's Palace, cunningly masked, to be found only by accident, even the cramped door concealed by the branches of a tortured cedar. Norton pushed them aside and they entered.

"I have cached a few of my things here," he told her as they confronted each other in the gloom of the room's interior, "and the joke of it is that my hiding-place is almost if not quite directly below the cayes where Galloway's rifles are. This is a secret, mind you! If you'll look around you'll find some of the articles our friends, the cliff-dwellers left behind them when they made their get-away."

In a dark corner she found a blackened coffee-pot and a frying-pan, proclaiming anachronistically that here was the twentieth century interloping upon the fifteenth, articles which Norton had hidden here. In another corner were jumbled the things which the ancient people had left to mark their passing, an earthenware water-jar, half a dozen spear and arrow points of stone, a clumsy-looking ax still fitted to its handle of century-seasoned cedar, bound with thongs.

"But, exclaimed the girl, "the wood, the rawhide—they would have disintegrated long ago. They must belong to the same age with your coffee-pot and frying-pan!"

"The air is bone dry," he reminded her. "What little rain there is never gets in here. Nothing decays; look yonder."

He showed her a basket made of withes, a graceful thing skilfully made, small, frail-looking and as perfect as the day it had come from a pair of quick brown hands under a pair of quick, black eyes. She took it almost with a sense of awe upon her.

"Keep it, will you?" he asked lightly. "As a memento. Presented by a cave-man through your friend the sheriff. Now let's get back before they miss us. I may have need of this place some time and I'd rather no one else knew of it."

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They made their way back as they had come and in silence, Virginia treasuring the token and with it the sense that her friend, the sheriff, had cared to share his secret with her.

They made of the day an occasion to be remembered, to be considered wistfully in retrospect during the troubled hours so soon to come to each one of the four of them. While Elmer and Florrie gathered firewood Norton showed Virginia how simple a matter it was here in this seldom-visited mountain stream to take a trout. Cool shaded pools under overhanging, gouged-out banks, tiny falls and shimmering riffles all housed the quick speckled beauties. Then, as Norton had predicted, the fish were fried, crisp and brown, in sizzling bacon grease while the thin wafers of bacon garnished the tin plate bedded in hot ashes.

They nooned in the shade of the grove, sipping their coffee that had the taste of some rare, black nectar. And throughout the long lazy afternoon they loitered as it pleased them, picked flowers, wandered anew through the ruins of the king's palace, lay by the singing water and were quietly content. It was only when the shadows had thickened over the world and the promise of the primroses was fulfilled that they made ready for the return ride. Before they had gone down to their horses the moths were coming to the yellow flowers, tumbling about them, filling the air with the frail beating of their wings.

At Struve's hotel—Elmer and Florence had ridden on to Engle's home—Virginia told Norton good night, thanking him for a perfect day. As their hands met for a little she saw a new, deeply probing look in his eyes, a look to be understood. He towered over her, physically superb. As she had felt it before so now did she experience that odd little thrill born from the nearness to him go singing through her. She withdrew her hand hastily and went in. In her own room she stood a long time before her glass, seeking to read what lay in her own eyes.

TOM CUTTER was waiting for Norton. Merely to tell him that a stranger had come to San Juan, a Mexican with all the earmarks of a gentleman and a man of means. The Mexican's name was Enrique del Rio. He evidently came from below the border. He had lost no time in finding Jim Galloway with whom he had been all afternoon.

CHAPTER XVI

ENRIQUE DEL RIO promptly became known to San Juan as the Mexican from Mexico, this to distinguish him from the many Mexicans as San Juan knew them who had never seen that turbulent field of intrigue and revolt from which their sires had come. He showed himself from the outset to be a gentleman of culture, discernment and ability. He was suave, he was polished, he gave certain signs of refinement.

His first afternoon and evening he bestowed upon Jim Galloway. The second day found him registered at Struve's hotel. The following morning he presented himself and a sheaf of credentials at the bank, asking for John Engle. With him came Ignacio Chavez in the rôle of interpreter. Del Rio spoke absolutely no English and had informed himself that Engle's Spanish was inadequate for the occasion.

"He is Señor Don Enrique del Rio," explained Ignacio, touched by the spell of the other's munificence and immaculate clothes. "He would like to shake the hand of Señor Engle to become acquainted and then friends. He brings papers to tell who and what he is in Mexico City whence he has departed because of too —— much fight down there; he wishes to put some money here in the *banco* which he can take away again to buy a big ranch and many cattle and horses. He had the other money in a *banco* in New York where he sent it out from Mexico two, three months ago."

And so on while Engle gravely listened and shrewdly, after his fashion in business hours, probed for the inner man under the outer polish while del Rio nodded and smiled and never withdrew his night-black eyes from Engle's face.

Del Rio, it appeared, had gone first to the Casa Blanca because he had heard of Jim Galloway as one of the most influential men of the county. Since arriving in San Juan, however, he had heard this and that, mere rumors, which caused him to come to Engle. He, a stranger, could ill-afford in the beginning, to have his name coupled with that of any man not known for his spotless integrity. Señor Engle understood? Later, when del Rio had found the properties to

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his liking and had builded a home, his wife and two daughters would arrive. Now they traveled in California.

In the end Engle accepted the Mexican's deposits which amounted to approximately a thousand dollars and which were to be drawn against merely as an expense-account until del Rio found his ranch. And the first item of expense was the purchase from Engel himself of a fine saddle-animal, a pure-blooded clean-limbed young mare, sister to Persis. After which the Mexican spent a great deal of his time riding about the country, looking at ranches. He visited Engle's two places, called upon Norton at Las Flores, ferreting out prices, looking at wheat and feed, examining soil.

It was a bare fortnight after the coming of del Rio when, out of Las Palmas, came word of fresh lawlessness. The superintendent of the three Quigley mines had been surprised the night before pay-day, forced at the point of a revolver to open his own safe and robbed of several thousand dollars. A man on horseback rushed word to San Juan, found Tom Cutter who located Norton the same afternoon at his ranch at Las Flores.

"Rod, old man," cried Cutter, angrily, "this —— thing has got to stop! You haven't a much better friend than I am, I guess, and I'm telling you straight that the whole county is getting sore on you. They will talk more than ever now, saying that it's up to you to get results and that you don't get them."

"The stick-up was last night?" asked the sheriff, coolly.

"Yes," snapped Cutter.

"You were in San Juan?"

"Yes."

"Where was Jim Galloway? Was he in town?"

"No, he wasn't. I don't know where he was. But I do know where he ought to be."

"Was the Mexican gent, del Rio, in town?"

Cutter opened his eyes.

"No. I don't think so. You haven't got anything on him, have you?"

"Only what you told me. Remember that his first day in San Juan he went to Galloway like a homing pigeon."

Norton went for his horse, saddled and rode swiftly to Las Palmas. In the mining-camp he went immediately to the office of Thompkins, the superintendent, whom he found cursing volubly.

"It's up to you," were his sharp words of greeting as he wheeled upon the sheriff. "What the —— do you think you're for, anyway? Good Lord, man, if you can't cut the mustard why don't you crawl out and let a man who can wear your star?"

"Easy there, Thompkins," said Norton, quietly. "You can do your raring and pitching after I'm gone. Tell me about it. What time did it happen?"

"It was hardly dark."

"How many men jumped you?"

"Just one. But——"

"Just one, eh?" He pondered the information. "That isn't the usual brand of Galloway work, is it? Get a good slant at him?"

"At his clothes," growled Thompkins, slamming himself down dejectedly in his chair. "His face was hid, of course."

"Ever see a Mexican named del Rio?"

Like Cutter before him Thompkins started.

"Don't ask me what I mean," Norton cut him short. "Del Rio is a pretty big man for a Mexican; was this highwayman about his size?"

Thompkins hesitated.

"It's hard to say just how big a man is when he comes in on you like that," he said at last. "At a guess I'd say that the man who stuck me up was a little taller than del Rio. But I wouldn't swear to it."

"It might have been del Rio himself, then?" Norton insisted.

"Yes. Or it might have been the devil's grandmother. I don't——"

"See anything of del Rio the last few days?"

"Saw him yesterday. He was in camp. Was talking mines."

"See anything of Galloway hereabouts of late?"

"No. Haven't seen him for a month or two."

Norton asked a few other questions, kept his own thoughts to himself and rode away. Less than a mile from the camp he met Jim Galloway riding a sweat-wet horse. The two men reined in sharply, each man's eyes matching the other's for hardness. Galloway's face was red, the fiery red of anger.

"Going back for what you forgot, Jim?" asked Norton.

For a moment Galloway, staring back at him, seemed utterly speechless in the grip of his wrath. Norton did not remember ever

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having seen such blazing anger in the prominent eyes.

"Between you and me, Rod Norton," muttered Galloway at last, "I have turned a trick or two in my time. And as far as I can see I haven't come to the end of my rope. But this job is none of my doing and if I wise up as to who put it over he'll go under the sand or into the pen and I'll put him there."

Norton laughed.

"In other words some free-lance has made a bid to break your corner on the crime-market, eh?" he jeered. "Put one over on you without your knowledge and consent? And without splitting two ways? That what you mean?"

"I mean that I'd pay five hundred dollars out of my own pocket right now for the dead-wood on the man who robbed Thompkins."

"Kid Rickard is around once more; sure he didn't do it?"

"Yes, I am. Kid Rickard didn't do it."

Norton eased himself in the saddle, thoughtfully regarding Galloway. And then, very abruptly:

"How about your friend, del Rio?"

It was the third time that he had mentioned del Rio's name in this connection and to the third man. And now, but slightly different in degree only, he saw the same look in Galloway's eyes which he had brought into Cutter's and Thompkins's.

"Del Rio?" repeated Galloway, frowningly. "What makes you say that?"

"I'll collect your five hundred later," was Norton's laughing response.

And, swerving out a little as he passed, he rode on.

CHAPTER XVII

JOHN ENGLE rapidly came to assume the nature and proportions of a stubborn bulwark standing sturdily between Roderick Norton and the fires of criticism which, springing from little, scattered flames were now a wide-spread blaze amply fed with the dry fuel of many fields. Again there had been a general excitement over a crime committed, much talk, various suspicions and, in the end, no arrest made. Men who had stood by the sheriff until now began to lose faith in him.

They recalled how, after the fight in the Casa Blanca, he had let Galloway go and with him Antone and the Kid; their memories trailed back to the killing of Bisbee of Las Palmas and the evidence of the boots. They began to admit, at first reluctantly, then with angry eagerness, that Norton was not the man his father had been before him, not the man they had taken him to be. And all of this hurt Norton's stanch friend, John Engle. All the more that he, too, saw signs of hesitancy which he found it hard to condone.

"Let him alone," he said many a time. "Give him his chance and a free hand. He knows what he is doing."

From that point he began to make excuses, first to himself and then to others. People were forgetting that only a short time ago the sheriff had lain many days at the point of death; that his system had been overtaxed; that not yet had his superb strength come back to him. Wait until once more he was physically fit.

It was merely an excuse and at the outset no man knew it better than the banker himself. But, as time went by without bringing results and tongues grew sharper and more insistent everywhere, Engle grew convinced that there was a grain of truth in his trumped-up argument. He invited Norton to his home, had him to dinner, watched him keenly and came to the conclusion that Norton was riding on his nerves, that he had not taken sufficient time to recuperate before getting his feet back into the official stirrups, that the strain of his duties was telling on him, that he needed a rest and a change or would go to pieces. And he lost no time in talking frankly to him.

But Norton, his lips tight, merely shook his head.

"I'm all right, John," he said a little hurriedly and nervously. "I am run down at the heels a bit, I'll admit. But I can't stop to rest right now. One of these days I'll quit this job and go back to ranching. Until then—well, let them talk. We can't stop them very well."

Suspicion of the Quigley mines robbery had turned at first toward del Rio. But he had established an alibi. So had Galloway. So had Antone and the Kid.

"There is nothing to do but wait," Norton insisted. "It won't be long now."

Engle, having less than no faith in Patten's ability, went to Virginia Page. She saw Norton often; what did she think?

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Was he on the verge of a collapse? Was he physically fit?

"All of this criticism hurts him," said the banker thoughtfully. "I know Rod and how he must take it though he only shrugs. It's gall and wormwood to him. He's up against a hard proposition as we all know; if he is half-sick I wonder if the proposition isn't going to be too much for him? Can't you advise him, persuade him to knock off for a couple of weeks and clear out? Get into a city somewhere and forget his work. Why, it's the most pitiful thing in the world to see a man like him lose his grip."

"He is not quite himself," she admitted slowly. "He is more nervous, inclined to be short and irritable, than he used to be. You may be right; or it may simply be that his continued failure to stop these crimes is wearing him down. I'll be glad to watch him, to talk with him if he will listen to me."

But first she forced herself to what seemed a casual chat with Patten, finding him loitering upon the hotel veranda. She suggested to him that Norton was beginning to show the strain, that he looked haggard under it, and wondered if he had quite recovered from his recent illness?

Patten, after his pompous way, leaned back in his chair, his thumbs in his armholes, his manner that of a most high judge.

"He's as well as I am," he announced, positively. "Thin, to be sure, just from being laid up those ten days. And from a lot of hard riding and worry. That's all."

Out of Patten's vest pocket peeped a lead pencil. Curiously enough it carried her mind back to Patten's incompetence. For it suggested the fountain pen which of old occupied the pencil's place and which the sheriff had taken in his haste to secrete a bit of paper with Patten's scrawl upon it. She wondered again just what had been on that paper, and if it were meant to help Norton prove that Patten had no right to the M. D. after his name. The incident, all but forgotten, remained prominently in her mind, soon to assume a position of transcendent importance.

And then, one after the other here and there throughout the county, came fresh crimes which not only set men talking angrily but which drew the eyes of the State and then of the neighboring States upon this corner of the world. Newspapers in the cities commented variously, most of them sweepingly condemning the county's sheriff for a figurehead and a boy who should never have been given a man's place in the sun.

New faces were seen in San Juan, in Las Estrellas, Las Palmas, Pozo, everywhere, and men said that the undesirable citizens of the whole Southwest were flocking here where they might reap with others of their ilk and go scot free. Naturally the Casa Blanca became headquarters for a large percentage of the newcomers.

"The condition in and about San Juan," commented one of the most reputable and generally conservative of the attacking dailies, "has become acute, unprecedented for this time in our development. It has become the asylum of the lawless. The authorities have shown themselves utterly unable to cope with it. A well-known figure of the desert town who long ago should have gone to the gallows, is daily growing bolder, attaching to himself the wildest of the insurging element, and is commonly looked upon as a crime-dictator. Unless there comes a stiffening in the moral fiber of the local officers we dread to consider the logical outcome of these conditions."

And so forth from countless quarters. Galloway openly jeered at Norton. New faces, looking out from the Casa Blanca, grinned widely as the sheriff now and then rode past. Engle and Struve and Tom Cutter, anxious and beginning to be afraid of what lurked in the future, met at the hotel and sought to hit upon a solution of the problem threatening them.

"Norton has got something up his sleeve," growled the hotel-keeper, "and he's as stubborn as a mule. He's after Galloway and it begins to look as though he were forgetting that his job is to serve the county first and his own private quarrels next. I've jawed him up and down; it only makes him shake his head like a horse with flies after him."

The three, hoping that their combined arguments might have weight with Norton, went to him and did not leave him until they had made clear what their thoughts were, what the whole State was saying of him. And, as Struve had predicted, he shook his head.

"These later robberies haven't been Galloway's work," he told them positively. "They were pulled off by the same man who stuck up Thompkins of the Quigley mines. Inside of a week I'll get something done;

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I'll promise you that. But let me do it my way."

Engle alone of the three drew a certain satisfaction from the interview.

"He has promised something definite," he told them. "Did you ever know him to do that and fail to keep his word? Maybe we're getting a little excited, boys."

The latest crime had been the robbery of the little bank at Packard Springs. The highwayman had gone in the night to the room of the cashier, forced him to dress, go to the bank and open his safe. The result was a theft of a couple of thousand dollars, no trace left behind and a growing feeling of insecurity throughout the county. It was for this crime that Norton meant and promised to make an arrest.

EXACTLY seven days from the day of his promise Norton rode into San Juan and asked for Tom Cutter. Struve, meeting him at the hotel door, looked at him sharply.

"Made that arrest yet, Norton?" he demanded.

Norton smiled.

"No I haven't," he admitted coolly. "But I've got a few minutes before my week's up, haven't I? Fix me up with something to eat and I'll have a talk with you and Tom while I attend to the inner man."

But over his meal, while Cutter and Struve watched him impatiently he did little talking other than to ask carelessly where del Rio was.

"—— it, man," cried Struve, irritably. "You've hinted at him before now. If he's a crook why don't you go grab him? He's in his room."

Norton swung about upon Struve, his eyes suddenly filled with fire.

"Look here, Struve," he retorted, "I've had about a bellyfull of badgering. I'm running my job and it will be just as well for you to keep your hands off. As for why I don't make an arrest—come on, Tom. You, too, Julius," his smile coming back. "I'm going to get del Rio."

"I don't believe—" began Struve.

"Seeing is believing," returned Norton, lightly. "Come on."

Followed by the two men Norton went direct to del Rio's room at the front of the house, just across the room from Virginia's office. At del Rio's quick "*Entra*," he threw open the door and went in. Del Rio, seated smoking a cigar, looked up with curious eyes which did not miss the two men following the sheriff.

"You are under arrest for the bank-robbery at Packard's Springs," said Norton, crisply.

"*Que quiere usted decir?*" demanded the Mexican to whom the English words were meaningless.

Norton threw back his vest, showing his star. And, while he kept his eye upon del Rio, he said quietly to Cutter.

"Look through his trunk and bags."

Del Rio, understanding quickly enough, sat smoking swiftly, his eyes narrowing as they clung steadily to Norton's. Cutter, a rising hope in his breast that at last his superior had made good, went to the little trunk in the corner. Del Rio shrugged and remained silent.

Cutter was tumbling out upon the floor an assortment of clothing evincing little respect for the Mexican's finery. Suddenly, when his hands had gone to the bottom, he sat back upon his heels, a leaping light in his eyes.

"Caught with the goods on, by God," he cried. "Look here, Struve!"

He had whipped out a canvas bag which gave forth the chink of gold. Another came after it. And across each bag was stamped—

Packard Springs Bank

Del Rio's eyes had wandered a moment to Cutter and the evidence. Then they came back to Norton, filled with black malevolence. One did not need to understand the Southern language to grasp the meaning of the words muttered under his breath.

Within the half-hour Struve, Cutter and Engle had apologized to Norton; after this, they promised him, to keep their hands off and their mouths shut.

That evening Virginia and Norton sat long together on Struve's veranda. There was more silence than talk between them. Norton seemed abstracted; the girl was plainly constrained, anxious, and found it difficult to keep her mind upon the thin thread of conversation joining their occassional remarks. Abruptly, out of one of their wordless intervals, she said quickly:

"Congratulate me on being a rich woman! I got a check from an old, almost forgotten patient today. A hundred dollars, all in

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one lump! It's a fortune in San Juan, isn't it?"

Norton laughed with her.

"I feel like spending it all in a breath," she ran on. "I went right away to Mr. Engle and had him cash it so that I could see what five twenty-dollar gold-pieces looked like. And I chinked them and played with them like a child! Do you think I am growing greedy for gold in my old age? You ought to see them piled up, though; five twenties. Isn't gold a pretty thing? I've a notion to go get them and show them to you; they're right on my table——"

She broke off suddenly, her hand on his arm.

"Did you see some one out there, at the corner of the house?" she asked quickly. "Do you think——"

Then she laughed again and settled back in her chair.

"Already thinking somebody is going to steal my gold! My five twenties! Just to punish myself I am going to leave them on my office table all night; do you suppose I'll be wondering all the time if somebody is crawling in at a window and taking them?"

Five minutes later she said good night and left him.

"I'll be up early in the morning," she said laughingly. "Just to make sure that my gold is there!"

AN HOUR later Virginia Page, sitting fully dressed in the darkness of her bedroom, got quietly to her feet and went to the door leading to her office. With wildly beating heart she stood listening, seeking to peer through the crack of the door she had left ajar. She had heard the faint, expected sound of some one moving cautiously.

Now she heard it again, then the rustling of loose papers lying on her table, then the faint, golden chink of yellow-minted disks. As she suddenly scratched the match in her hand, drawing it along the wall, she threw the door open. The tiny flame, held high, whipped the room from darkness into sufficient pale light. The man at her table whirled upon her, an exclamation caught in his throat, his hand going to his hip, the other hand closing tight upon what it held.

She came in, her eyes steadily upon his, her face gone deathly pale. As the match fell from her fingers she went to the open window and drew down the shade. Then she lit a second match, set it to her lamp and sank wearily into her chair.

"Shall we thresh matters out, Mr. Norton?" she asked.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOLLOWING Virginia's barely audible words there was a long silence. Her eyes, dark with the trouble in them, rested upon Norton's face and saw the frown go from his brows while slowly the red seeped into his bronzed cheeks. For the first time in her life she saw him staggered by the shock of surprise, held hesitant and uncertain. For a little there was never a movement of his rigid muscles; one hand rested upon the butt of his revolver, the other was closed upon the stack of gold pieces. When at last he found his tongue it was to accuse her.

"You trapped me," he said bitterly.

"With golden bait," she admitted, her voice oddly spiritless. "Yes."

"Well," he challenged. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Do? I don't know!"

Again they grew silent, studying each other intently. Norton, his poise coming back to him as the unusual color receded from his face, smiled at her with affectation of his old manner. Suddenly he stepped back to her table, noiselessly set down the coins, eased himself into a chair.

"You wished to thresh things out? I am ready. And, in case we should be interrupted, you know, I have called on you in your official capacity. We'll say that I am troubled by the old wound in the head; that will do as well as anything, won't it?"

"It was you who robbed the bank at Pozo!" she cried softly, leaning toward him, the look in her eyes one of dread now. "And the mine superintendent at Las Palmas? And I don't know how many other people. It was you!"

She had startled him in the beginning; she knew she would not draw another sign of surprise from him. He had himself under control and long years of severe training made that control complete. He merely looked interested under her sweeping accusation.

"You must have a reason for a charge like that," he remarked evenly.

"Do you deny it?"

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"I deny nothing, I affirm nothing right now. I say that you must have a reason for what you state."

"You put the incriminating evidence in del Rio's trunk," she ran on hurriedly. "The canvas bags of gold. Didn't you?"

"Reason?" he insisted equably.

"You took Caleb Patten's fountain pen! I saw you."

He lifted his brows at her. Then he laughed softly.

"In the first place," he replied thoughtfully, "I really believe that he is not Caleb at all but Charles Patten. We'll talk of that later, however. In the second place isn't it rather humorous to wind up by accusing a man with the theft of a fountain pen after your other charges?"

"Answer one question," she urged earnestly. "Please. It is only a small matter. Give me your word of honor that you will answer it truthfully."

He was very grave as he sat for a moment, head down, twirling his big hat in slow fingers. Then he smiled again as he looked up.

"Either truthfully or not at all," he promised her. "My word of honor."

She was plainly excited as she set him her question, seeming at once eager and afraid to have his response.

"I saw you take Patten's fountain pen and a scrap of note-paper from the table by your bed when you were hurt. The first time I called to see how you were doing. I thought that perhaps there was something of importance written on the paper, that, if nothing else, you wanted a bit of Patten's handwriting to use in your proof that he was not the man he pretended to be. You slipped both pen and paper under your pillow. Tell me just this: was that paper of any importance whatever, of any interest even to you?"

"No," he said steadily, without hesitation. "It was not. I did not so much as look at it."

She leaned back in her chair with a long sigh, her eyes wide on his. And, while he marveled at it, he saw that now her look was one of pure pity.

"Just what that has got to do with the robberies you mention——"

"Everything!" she burst out. "Everything! Can't you see? Oh, my God!"

She dropped her face into her hands and he saw her shoulders lift and slump. And, glancing aside swiftly, he saw the five golden disks on the table, almost to be reached from where he sat.

"No doubt," he said hastily as her head was lifted again, "you think that you would like to send me to jail?"

"Jail, no! A thousand times no! But you must, you must let me send you to a hospital!"

He frowned at her while he gave over twirling his hat and grew very still.

"You think I am crazy?" he asked sharply. "That it?"

"No. You are as sane as I am. I don't think that at all. But—oh, can't you understand?"

"No, I can't. You accuse me of this and that, you give no reasons for your wild suspicions, you end up by suggesting medical treatment. What's the answer, Virginia Page?"

"The answer, Roderick Norton, is a very simple one. But first I am going to ask you another question or so. You sought to commit a theft tonight; I saw you, so there is no use denying it to me, is there?"

"Go ahead. What next?"

"While you lay ill during a week or ten days you had time to think. You remember having told me that you had had time to think about everything in the world? It was at that time, wasn't it, that you came to the decision which you mentioned to me that a man to commit crime and play safe at the same time must keep in mind two essential matters: first, the lone hand; second, not to kill?"

"I thought it out then; yes. In fact I suppose I told you so."

"The crimes committed recently have been characterized by these two essentials, haven't they? Nearly all of them?"

He nodded, watching her keenly, holding back his answers for just a second or two each time.

"I believe so."

"Did you ever have an impulse to steal before you were knocked unconscious at the Casa Blanca?"

"No."

"And you have had that impulse almost all the time ever since? Answer me; tell me the truth! I am right, am I not?"

Now again he laughed softly at her.

"Virginia Page, the medico, speaks," he returned lightly. "She has a theory. A man may have such an accident leaving

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such and such pressure on the brain, with the result that he becomes a thief or worse! Virginia——"

"Theory! It is no theory. It is an established, undeniable and undenied fact! It has occurred time and again, physicians have observed, have made cures! Can't you see now, Rod Norton? Won't you see?"

She was upon her feet, her hands clasped before her, her eyes shining, her figure tense, her cheeks stained with the color of her excitement.

"I don't care whether Patten is a physician or not," she ran on. "He is a bungler. It is a sheer wonder he did not let you die. You told me yourself that he attributed the second wound to your fall and that you knew that Moraga had struck you a terrible blow with his gun-barrel. Patten did not treat that wound; he cared for the lesser injury like a fool and allowed the major one to take care of itself. And the result—oh, dear God! Think of what might have happened. If any one but me had learned what I have learned tonight."

He rose with her, stood still regarding her with eyes like drills. Then he shook his head.

"You are wrong, Virginia, dead wrong," he told her with quiet emphasis. "You have called me a thief? Well, perhaps I am. You have given your explanation; let me give mine."

He paused, shaping the matter in mind. His face was stern and very, very grave. Presently, his lowered voice guarded against any chance ears, he continued.

"I LAY on my bed a week, a long, utterly damnable week. I could do nothing but think. So I thought, as I told you, of everything. Most of all I thought of you, Virginia Page. Shall I tell you why? No; we'll let that go until we understand each other. I thought of myself, of my life, of my eternal striving with Jim Galloway. Some day I should get Galloway or he would get me. In either case, what good? Was not Galloway a wiser man than I? He took what he wanted; I merely wasted my time chasing after such bigger men as he. If he desired a thousand dollars or five, ten thousand, he went out for it like a man and took it. Why shouldn't he?

"Oh, I tell you I had the time to roll over the little meaningless words of honesty and dishonesty, honor and dishonor, and all of their progeny and forbears! They are empty; empty, I tell you, Virginia! When I stood on my feet again I was a free man. I knew it then, I know it now. Free, I tell you. Free, most of all from shackles of empty ideas. What I wanted I would take."

She looked at him helplessly, his dominant vigor for the moment seeming a thing not to be restricted or tamed.

"What you have done," she told him gently, "is to find argument to bolster up impulse. That is generally a very easy thing to do, isn't it? If one wants a thing it is not hard convincing himself that it is right that he should have it."

"At least I have decided sanely what I wanted; there is no call for hospitals."

"You sustained a fracture of the skull. That fracture had improper treatment. It is a wonder you did not die. The wound healed and there remains a pressure of a bit of bone upon the brain. Until that pressure is removed by an operation you are doomed to be a criminal. A kleptomaniac," she said steadily, "if not much worse."

"I believe that you mean what you say. You are just mistaken, that is all. I'd know if there were anything physically wrong."

She came closer, laid her hand upon his arm, lifted her eyes pleadingly to his.

"I have had the best of medical training," she said slowly. "I have specialized in brain disorders, interested in that branch of my work until I decided to bring Elmer out here. I know what I am saying. Will you at least promise to do as I ask? Have a thorough examination by a specialist? And have the operation if he advises it?"

"Such an operation is a serious matter?"

"Yes. It must be. But think——"

"A man might die under the hands of the surgeon?"

"Yes. There is always the danger, there is always the chance of death resulting from any but the most minor of operations. But you are not the man to be afraid, Rod Norton. I know that."

"You say that you have specialized in this sort of thing." He was probing for her thoughts with keen, narrowed eyes. "Would you be willing to perform that operation for me?"

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She shrank back suddenly, her hand dropping from his arm.

"No," she cried. "No, no."

He smiled triumphantly.

"Then we'll let it go for a while. If you wouldn't care to do it, afraid that I might die under your knife, I guess I don't want it done at all. I am quite content with things as they are. I see the way to gain the ends I desire; I am gaining them; if there is a brain pressure, well I'm quite ready to thank God and Moraga for it! Which you may take as absolutely final, Dr. Page!"

She was beaten then and she knew it. She went back to her chair in a sort of bewildered despair, her hands dropping idly to her lap.

"It would be just as well," he said presently, "if I left before any one came in. Before I go, do you mind telling me what you mean to do? Shall you denounce me? Are you going to spread your suspicions abroad?"

"What do you leave me to do? Have I the right to sit still and say nothing? You would go on as you have begun; you would commit fresh crimes. In spite of your 'two essentials' you would be led to kill a man sooner or later. Or you yourself would be killed. Have I the right to allow all of that to go on?"

"Then you have decided to accuse me?"

"It is so hard to decide anything. You make it so hard; can't you see that you do? But after all my part is clear; if you will consent to an examination and an operation I will say nothing of what has happened. If you won't do that—you will drive me to tell what I know."

"Our trails divide tonight, then? I had hoped for better than that, Virginia."

Though her cheeks flushed she held her eyes steadily upon his.

"I too had hoped for better than that," she confessed, finding this no time for faltering. "I should continue to hope if you would just do your part."

He had taken a swift step toward her. Then he stopped suddenly, his hands falling to his sides. But the light in his eyes did not diminish.

"Denounce me tomorrow, if you wish," he said slowly, indifferently it seemed to her. "Accept my promise that I will attempt no theft of more gold tonight; give me this one last chance to talk with you. Before some one comes come out with me. You are not afraid of me; you admit that I am sane. Then let us ride together. And let me talk with you freely. Will you, Virginia? Will you do that one favor for me?"

The high desire was upon her to accede to his request; her calmer judgment forbade it. But tonight was tonight; tomorrow would be tomorrow. And after all, in her talk with him, she might save the man to himself and to his truer manhood.

But even that hope was less than her desire when she answered him.

"Have my horse saddled," she said. "I'll let Struve think I have to make a call at Las Estrellas. I'll be out in five minutes."

He thanked her with his eyes, opened the hall door and went out.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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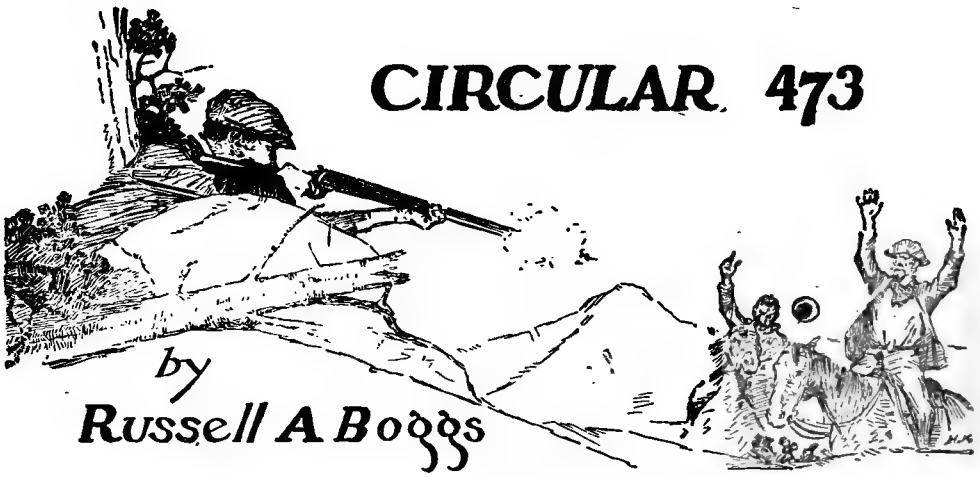

CIRCULAR 473

by

Russell A Boggs

Author of "A Regular Rounder," "The Better Mixer," etc.

FROM Morey young Joseph Reilly traveled north— But probably it would be best to start at the beginning.

Two days after the hold-up of No. 12 at Whitehorse Cut, all the agents on the Second Division of the S. N. W. received a circular from the office of Superintendent Nichols. It so happened that at this time Joseph Reilly was working as extra agent for the S.N.W., putting in a few months at Morey relieving Harry Baker, the regular agent there—Baker being temporarily off duty with a broken forearm, the unfortunate result of a wrestling match with a two-hundred and fifty pound trunk. Morey is on the Second Division; so of course Reilly received a copy of Circular 473.

And Circular 473 read:

A fairly accurate description has been obtained of the two men who held up train No. 12 last Saturday night, at Whitehorse Cut, and who, after looting the express and mail cars, succeeded in making good their escape.

The taller of the two bandits is about six feet in height, weighs around 180 pounds, has large feet and dark brown hair. Probably the most noticeable thing about him, however, is the mutilated index finger on his left hand, this finger apparently having been at one time severed at the first knuckle.

The other bandit is about five feet nine inches in height, weighs around 160 pounds, has sandy hair and has a bald spot about the size of a silver dollar on the crown of his head.

All agents and employees will keep a sharp lookout for strangers answering the description of these two robbers. In case any one is seen whom you suspect, notify this office at once by wire.

Whitehorse Cut was some forty miles below Morey. Joe Reilly read the circular carefully. The bandits, he understood, had made a pretty big haul. Official reports admitted a loss of ten thousand dollars; therefore Joe shrewdly placed the figure at about fifty thousand—perhaps it would be more.

The next morning Harry Baker reported for duty.

"The old arm's in shape again," he said to Joe. "She works just as good as ever."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Joe. "Ready for work then, eh?"

"Yes; I guess I might as well start in."

"All right," agreed Joe promptly. "I'm about ready to move, anyway."

So, after wiring Superintendent Nichols, the transfer of the station accounts was made and Reilly was ready to depart. He boarded the first northbound passenger train that came along and journeyed until he came to the terminal where division headquarters was located. There he alighted, went to the superintendent's office, waited a few minutes until Nichols was free to see him and then was admitted.

"Well," said Joe to the superintendent, "we got things at Morey fixed up; Baker is working the job again."

"Your work there was very satisfactory, Reilly," said Nichols. He toyed with a penholder for a moment. "I've been well pleased."

"Thanks," murmured Joe, smiling.

"And now what have you in mind?" asked Nichols. "Going to move on?"

"Maybe. Can you use me any more?"

"I might send you after the fellows who held up No. 12 the other night," said Nichols. He smiled.

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"Give me a gun," returned Joe readily. "I'll go get 'em."

"No," laughed Nichols. "No. Much as we want to land those two boys, I guess we'll not turn you loose on them!"

He chuckled merrily over his conceit. Then his face became more serious.

"All jokes aside though," he said, "I'm afraid I haven't much to offer you. Fact is, I've got but one place open; a station up in the Montana hills—Roscoe."

"Big place?"

"No, just a little town. Nothing much around but some mines. It's on a little branch line. Not much to do—and on Sundays nothing at all—no trains."

"That'd just suit me! I'm a nature lover and I'd spend Sundays looking at the scenery. I believe I'll go." Joe grinned. "Yes," he declared, "I know I will; I'll go to Roscoe!"

Nichols looked relieved.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid you might not care to stay with us."

"Oh, I'll stick around a while, anyway," assured Joe. "I'm not usually very particular—just so I'm not in any one place too long. When do I go?"

"Just as soon as you can start," said the superintendent. "The office there is closed; the last agent we had simply threw up the job, then beat it away. You go and open up the place and do the best you can."

"I'll do all of that," promised Joseph.

Consequently Joseph Reilly journeyed north to Roscoe. It was bright and early on a cloudless morning when he landed on the plank platform that surrounded the little red station there. The cheerful sun, peeping over a big hill, drove fantastic shafts of silver and gold through the ascending smoke that rose above the departing train.

Roscoe town lay before him: A few dozen shacks and rough-drawn dwellings; a general store; a saloon and hotel combined—this being in the days before Montana, alcoholically speaking, became an arid zone—a post-office; all this scattered along a few twisting streets.

Northwest and southwest the clean valley extended, the mighty hills arising on either side. Just beyond the town could be caught glimpses of sparkling, rushing water. This pleased young Joseph; it meant, most likely, fish.

The newly arrived agent filled his lungs deeply with the keen snappy air.

"This looks good to me," he proclaimed aloud. His eyes considered the one short station siding, bare of cars. "As Nichols says, 'not much to do'—and lots of room to do it in!"

He stooped and picked up his well-worn grip.

"After I get things unscrambled and going slick, I've an idea it'll be good sport looking over these hills."

He moved toward the closed depot, fumbling in his pocket for the station keys that Nichols had given him.

WITHIN a few days Reilly had things running with fair smoothness at Roscoe station. He had found affairs in a sad snarl, due to the incompetence, or carelessness, of the previous agent. Joe sorted out tickets, freight and express, and checked them all up with what records he could find. The bill box he found full of train mail—tariffs, circulars and correspondence. The correspondence he disposed of somehow, answering it to the best of his ability. The tariffs and circulars he filed.

Among the circulars he found a copy of number 473—the one relating to the two train-robbers. As he stuffed it in the drawer of his filing cabinet he wondered, somewhat idly, if the robbers ever would be caught. He shut the drawer; and in the vigorous prosecution of his other immediate duties the matter slipped into his subconscious mind.

II

THERE had been rain—a hard, dashing shower that sent the water pouring down Roscoe's streets. And in its mad hurry to reach the creek the water that tumbled down the main street had cut sharply across the roadway, just in front of the Only Chance hotel and bar.

The shower passed, the sky cleared, the sun came forth. And now, in the evening, his tasks finished for the day, Joe Reilly sat on a tilted chair in front of the Only Chance, side by side with the Only Chance's proprietor. The two of them were finding much quiet amusement in the mud-hole that lay before their very door.

It was a light chocolate-faced, innocent appearing mud-hole; but its appearance was deceiving. A vehicle would come

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along, the horse—or horses—would plod through the slough, and then the front wheels of the conveyance would quite suddenly plop down into the mire to unexpected depths, and stop.

Three times had this happened while Joe and Proprietor Hodgson watched. Fortunately, though, after his first grunt of surprise each driver so far, by careful maneuvering, had been able to pull out of the mire and go on; but not before sarcastically inquiring of Hodgson why the Sam Hill somebody didn't fix up the road.

"Fix it?" Hodgson laughed at the last sarcastic inquirer. "No sir! That mud-hole's all right! I've had more fun out of it than I've had over anything for a month. What you fellows need is to keep your eyes open so's you won't go into 'em blind."

Between times Joe and the hotel man contemplated the decorations the descending sun was making on the far hilltops. To Hodgson it was just another sunset. But Joe reflected that here was something pretty nice—extra nice.

Through the open doorway of the store—set diagonally across the street from the Only Chance—a man presently came forth and threw a long sack, heavy at both ends, across the back of a patient horse waiting at the edge of the road.

The man was slightly stooped, bent over by the stiffening muscles of advanced years. His hair, thick, bushy and gray, curled around the back of his neck, below an old battered hat. He wore a beard, unkempt and straggly, and gray like the hair on his head.

After disposing the sack across the horse's back he took a fresh paper of tobacco from a pocket, tore it open expertly, crammed his jaws, replaced the paper package, looked around mildly, perceived the two seated in front of the saloon and waved his hand in greeting to Hodgson.

"Old Johnny Barbold," said the hotelman aside to Joe. "Got a little mine out here in the hills."

At that moment the to-be-expected happened. From an alleyway that led to the rear of the store a teamster had turned into the main street, his wagon loaded heavily with bags of cement. The horses waded through the mud-hole; the front wheels of the wagon dropped in and stopped dead.

The surly-looking teamster applied the stinging lash of his blacksnake whip; he jerked and sawed on the reins; he cursed. The horses strained forward on the traces. The wheels budged about an inch forward, but that was all; they remained in the hole.

The driver extended himself: he applied his whip without restraint; ditto his curses. But all to no better result.

"Git a plank!" advised Johnny Barbold from the side of the road. "Go git a plank!"

The driver desisted from his attentions to the team and glared at Johnny for a second.

"Go git to ——!" he flashed at Johnny; and jumping from his wagon again laid on the gad.

Barbold, quite unruffled, stepped out and placed a hand on the raging man's shoulder.

"Here," he remonstrated calmly. "That's no way to do."

The teamster angrily attempted to shake off the hand; but Barbold kept firm hold.

"'Tain't no use," he insisted. "You go git a plank or two and chuck 'em under them wheels."

The driver completely lost his temper. He whirled around on Barbold, his heavy whip upraised.

"By the great guns!" he roared. "Git 'way from here or I'll crack you over your fool head!"

Joe Reilly and Hodgson, meantime, had been observing the action attentively.

"Why, do tell!" exclaimed Joe as he beheld the driver threaten Johnny. "If it isn't a regular movie scene: stalled team, brutal driver, tender-hearted old gentleman whom the brutal driver is about to assault—everything but the rescuing hero!" He leaped to his feet. "I guess that's me!" he said and took quick strides out into the street.

With his left hand he swiftly grasped the driver's collar while with his right hand he grasped the whip. He twisted this latter, jerked—and the whip came free. He tossed it on to the wagon.

"You do as the old-timer tells you!" said Joe, and with small gentleness jerked the teamster backward by the collar. "No more fussing about it, either!" he said and shook the fellow again, then straightened him up. Joe dropped his hand. "How about it?"

The driver was no small man, but all belligerent ideas appeared to fade quickly away as he regarded Joe. Reilly was fully

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as big; and besides there was a certain lean, hungry look in his eyes that did much to pacify Old Johnny's erstwhile probable assailant.

"Well—" stuttered the teamster. "All right—I s'pose I might as well."

"That's the spirit," approved Joe. "Come on; we'll all help."

A little time later the teamster was successfully sent on his way. Old Johnny, Joe and Hodgson watched him go.

"I hate to see a man be a fool," observed Barbold, turning to Joe. "I'm glad to see you've got the same notions, too."

"I reckon we can now take time for an introduction," put in Hodgson. "Johnny, meet up with Mr. Reilly, new agent here for the S. N. W. Mr. Joseph Reilly, Mr. Johnny Barbold."

"Call me Johnny," said the mine-owner as the two shook hands. "Will you have a drink?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to let me off," declined Joe smiling. "Railroader, you know."

"That's all right," returned Johnny. "I don't use it myself." He spat precisely into the street. "Hodge, did I ever tell you how I came to swear off?"

From Hodgson's expression Joe gathered that this was a famous, oft repeated tale.

"You did," replied the hotelman unfeelingly; he winked at Joe.

Johnny caught the wink, but it didn't disturb him in the least.

"Hodge," he said, "I'm disappointed in you. Just because there's two of us here who don't buy your licker is no reason why you should show your bad manners."

Hodgson chuckled.

"Go on and tell it," he urged patiently.

"I will, never you mind," replied Johnny. He looked at Joe. "You see," he continued, "when I was about eighteen I left home, back East, because the step-mother and me had a dispute about who was the least account 'round the farm. Being a woman, she won. So I lit out.

"Among other things I took when I left was a Bible that I carried in one pocket and a quart of whisky that I carried in another. On the way across country to the nearest town my load began to get pretty heavy; so when I came to a little creek I decided to lighten up. I took the Bible and the bottle of licker, one in each hand. I looked at one and I looked at the other. As far as I could see neither had ever done me a bit of good and I didn't believe they ever would. So I threw them both into the creek and went on. And I ain't used neither one since."

"Just about half of that ain't so," said Hodgson mildly as Johnny finished.

" 'Tis too!" said Johnny.

"Bill Harmon said he saw a Bible stickin' under your bunk, last Spring," said Hodgson placidly.

Johnny snorted.

"Bill Harmon better not let me see him snoopin' 'round my cabin," he said crossly. He looked at Joe again. "You come out some day and I'll prove it."

"Prove it?" repeated Joe.

"Yes; prove I ain't got one."

"He'll have it hid away good by that time," said the unfeeling Hodgson.

Old Johnny's crossness suddenly fell from him.

"Anyway, it's a good story," he said, laughing gently as he twinkled at Joe. "Have you been here long?"

"This is my third day," answered Reilly.

"What'll you do Sundays?"

"Nothing much, I guess. Talk, listen, walk around, look—anything."

"Come out to my place," insisted Johnny cordially. "This is Saturday; come out tomorrow. I got some real good things to look at. Hodge here'll lend you a horse—won't you, Hodge?"

"Sure," said the hotel man. "Glad to."

"Then you do that," pursued Johnny, to Joe. "What do you say?"

"I'll come, you bet," promised Joe. "How do I go?"

Johnny turned and pointed to where the last edge of the setting sun was just slipping behind the hill.

"Right below where that sun is," he said. "That's where you'll find me. Cross the creek, follow it down for a couple miles or so till you come to a trail that leads over across the valley. Follow the trail for about ten mile and you'll come to my place."

"I'll be there," said Joe.

III

OLD Johnny Barbold and Joe Reilly sat in the doorway of Johnny's cabin and viewed the sweeping valley that lay below them.

Dinner was over. They had dined royally on fragrant bacon, canned beans,

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sourdough bread, butter and jam; for a beverage they had coffee such as not all mothers know how to make. Then, leaving the dishes standing on the table, they rose and seated themselves on the cabin doorstep, pipes going.

For once the breeze had died away to almost nothing; and for an hour or more Old Johnny spun tales of the old days—marvelous tales that held Joe silent and absorbed. Johnny finished a tale of a mighty target-shooting match whereat he had come out victorious, the prize being a matchless repeating rifle; he stepped into his cabin and reappeared with a gun in his hand.

"This is it," he said to Joe.

He placed the rifle in Joe's hands.

It was a beautiful gun, a .30-30, decorated with exquisite scrollwork, inlaid with silver. And it had been given rare care; not a spot nor a blemish was upon it.

"She's a lulu," said Joe with enthusiasm. He pressed the stock against his cheek and squinted along the barrel.

From a box that he had brought out with him, Barbold took a couple of cartridges and slipped them into the magazine; he worked the lever to throw one of the cartridges into the chamber. A hundred yards below the cabin a dead pine lifted its naked limbs into the air.

"See that pine?" asked Johnny.

"Yes," nodded Joe.

"Keep your eye on that twig—the highest one on the tree," said Johnny.

He raised the rifle, pressed the trigger. The end of the tree's highest twig flipped up into the air, clipped neatly.

"She's a good gun," said Johnny and put down the rifle.

Joe took the piece and raised it to his shoulder after throwing the other cartridge into the chamber.

"You watch the rest of that twig," he said, and fired. Once more a piece of the tiny branch flew into the air.

"That's right good!" beamed Johnny. "You seem to be pretty much at home with a weapon yourself."

"Oh, I guess I've learned a little about one, traveling 'round," said Joe modestly.

Barbold regarded him with approving, reflective eyes.

"I expect maybe you've been about quite some," he observed, half-questioningly.

"Yes, that's right," replied Joe.

He smiled faintly as he considered the long twisting trail of his wanderings.

"Yes, I've been here and there."

Barbold slowly nodded his head.

"I figgered so," he said, and was silent for a little time. "You see," he presently added, "a man can nearly always tell that by the way the other fellow acts. You can sure pick up a lot, travelin'."

Again he was silent a moment.

"I've been around some, too," he said finally.

Joe waited. He felt certain something more would follow.

"If I'd stayed there—back East," went on Johnny, "I expect by now, if I'd worked hard, I might maybe have owned a little farm, or something. But I come out here, where I've rammed up and down for a good many years.

"A rollin' stone's no good, they say. Well, maybe not. But if I ain't been a rollin' stone I don't know who has. And what's more, I wouldn't trade what all I've saw and what I've got right here for the prettiest farm that ever spread itself over them Eastern hills."

Johnny Barbold drew deeply on his pipe.

"You see," he said quietly, "I've got a pretty good claim staked out here." He eyed Joe shrewdly. "Most folks don't know just how good it is."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Joe. "Well, that's good!"

"Yes, sir," said Johnny. "She's all there." He appeared to meditate over his pipe, glancing keenly at Joe now and then.

"Somehow," he said at length, "I believe you're all right. And then, too, I've been holdin' myself in for so long I reckon it's 'bout time for my vanity to bust out. I believe I'll show you something."

"I'll be pleased to see it," laughed Joe.

Barbold entered his cabin and Joe heard him fumbling around somewhere near the fireplace. There was a sound as of a heavy stone being raised and dropped; and in a moment Johnny reappeared, a plump leather bag in his hands.

Johnnie untied a stout leather thong that bound it, rolled down the top and held it close for Joe's inspection.

The bag was half-filled with gold—mostly dust, but also some nuggets.

"Holy Smokes!" ejaculated Joe, astonished.

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He filled his hand and let the yellow stuff trickle through his fingers in the sunlight.

"Holy Smokes! I should say this is something to show!"

Old Johnny's face was covered with a smile.

"Fifteen years' diggin', that is," he said. A note of quiet triumph was in his voice. "I've drove two drifts into this hill for that—two drifts that together are just fifteen years long." The smile on his face took on a whimsical twist. "I'm figurin' on takin' things a little easier though, soon."

"How so?" asked Joe, with interest.

"I'm going to buy me a little old crusher, set it up down at the foot of the hill, build me a chute to roll my rock down, hire me some miners, crush my ore, sack it, buy me a auto truck—maybe two—haul the ore to Roscoe, ship it by rail to a smelter at Butte—and take life easy on my profits. Simple ain't it?"

"By Crippy!" cried Joe. "And this stuff you've got in the bag is to pay for it all?"

"Sure thing!" said Johnny. "I've got pretty close to fifteen thousand dollars worth in there, and that'll pay for the whole thing—or pretty near it. I couldn't get capital to develop any other way, so I just went to work and dug it out. Now I can go into it big—big for me, that is."

"Here's luck!" cried Joe. He reached out his hand and he and Barbold solemnly shook. "You'll make it a go, too!"

"Can't figger how I can lose," said Johnny. "From the foot of the hill where I'll put my crusher there's a good grade clear to Roscoe. Not a bad place to the trail—and the truck'll make it's own road. I've had the ore assayed; got the freight rates; figgered the cost of operation, allowing big margins for mistakes and oversights. It all comes out on my side; I'll make the money."

He took the bag and set it on top of an empty store-box that stood just within the doorway.

"And now," he said, "if you want to climb on up the hill and see what you can see from the top while I wash up these dishes and things, why go ahead."

"I'll help do 'em first," offered Joe.

"Get out!" said Johnny. "You run right along. Follow that little footpath that bears off to the left and you'll get there. Things look real nice, if you go clear up."

"All right, then, said Joe. "I believe I'll do that."

IV

FROM the south two travelers worked their laborious way along the mountainside. It was no place for horses; and yet each traveler had a horse, which he led by the bridle rein, around trees and boulders and up and down gullies.

Travelers and horses gave evidence of much hard going—weary-eyed, sagging from over-exertion. Without words the two men stumbled on, their faces set and sullen.

And then, suddenly, through the trees they beheld a little cabin, set in a nook of the mountainside directly ahead of them. Below the cabin two holes yawned in the hillside, while below each hole straggled a dump of quartz and clay. At the foot of the dumps tumbled a lively little stream of water.

The taller traveler, who was in the lead, stopped with a grunt.

"Some fool miner," he growled to his fellow. "We'll climb up and go 'round above him."

The shorter man gazed at the steep hillside and the jagged boulders above him; he scowled.

"Climb up if you want!" His voice was an even deeper growl than the other's. "I'm going straight across."

He pulled his horse's rein and started ahead.

"Here, stop!" exclaimed the taller man. "Don't be a fool, Karfox!"

Karfox halted.

"Oh, you make me sick, Gilbert!" he sneered. "You and your everlastin' caution! We've give 'em all the slip; what're you afraid of?"

"You never can tell," persisted Gilbert. "I guess we've got away clean, all right; but what's the use of taking any unnecessary risks—now when we're almost over this range. Once we're over we can feel pretty sure we'll be safe; so what's the use of running a risk?"

Karfox's face did not lose its scowl.

"I tell you," he grumbled, "I'm not going to climb up over them big rocks. God, I'm filled with this past week's eternal

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climbing! My bones ache in a thousand places."

He pulled on the rein again and once more started forward. Over his shoulder he peered back at Gilbert, a sudden twisted grin distorting his thin lips.

"And what's more," he said, "if I see the sourdough in his cabin I'm going to ask him for a chew—if it kills me. I haven't had a taste for the last three days, as you know, and I'm dyin' for one. I will die if I don't get it; so what's the difference."

His voice was defiant, reckless.

"You don't have to have a chew," said Gilbert shortly.

"You don't have to have one, you mean," sneered Karfox. "You don't use it. But I do; and I'll have it, too, if there's any one there to get it from."

He kept on.

Gilbert regarded him with a half-contemptuous, half-tolerant expression. Then he followed after.

"Have it your own way, then," said Gilbert. "But if anything happens, remember I warned you."

Old Johnny Barbold, rattling pots and pans within his cabin, failed to hear the travelers' approach. But when a shadow darkened his doorway he looked up quickly, wondering if Reilly had returned so soon.

But it was Karfox's unlovely countenance that was thrust in at the doorway. Behind Karfox stood another man, Gilbert. Strangers, both, to Johnny.

"Howdy, old-timer," greeted Karfox. "Got any chewin'?"

Old Johnny put down a pan.

"Sure!" he said affably. "Come in, come in!"

He drew a generous-sized packet of tobacco from his hip pocket and extended it to Karfox.

Karfox stepped inside, took the package of tobacco and looked around for a place to rest his weary self while he partook of the weed for which his palate craved. A foot-square box was standing just within the door, a plump leather bag upon it. Karfox lifted the bag to set it aside while he rested.

Considering its size, it was a heavy little bag and unexpected effort was required to lift it. Karfox, somewhat surprised, cast a sharp glance at it. The bag was untied; and through a narrow slit of an opening he caught a glimpse of something that caused his eyes to glitter suddenly.

Hiding his sudden interest, Karfox set the bag down beside him on the ground as if he had noticed nothing. He pried open the package of tobacco and slowly, methodically stuffed his mouth full.

"My, that tastes good!" he sighed.

Barbold had noticed the shorter man lift the bag from the box. Silently he berated himself for having failed to return the gold to its hiding-place promptly after Joe's departure up the mountain. Still, he hoped the visitor might not have noticed the contents of the bag. Or, if he had noticed, that it would give rise to no evil thoughts on the visitor's part.

Karfox passed the tobacco to Gilbert, who now was leaning against the door-jamb.

"Have some," said Karfox facetiously.

"Thanks, no," said Gilbert, his manner gravely disapproving.

He stepped inside and returned the package to Barbold.

A sly hand touched Gilbert's knee as he stepped past Karfox on his way back to the door. He looked down. Karfox shot a swift pregnant glance at his partner, then down at the bag.

"Anything else I can do?" hospitably inquired the worried Johnny—trying, however, to conceal his anxiety.

"N-no—" began Gilbert.

"Yes!" broke in Karfox. "You can give us this bag!"

He whipped out a pistol and covered the old miner.

Johnny was dismayed. But the riches gathered by fifteen years of toil are not, usually, willingly or easily relinquished. All Johnny's hopes and future plans were based on the wealth that the bag contained. He had no gun upon him; but that did not deter him from an effort to save his property. Regardless of the covering pistol, heedless of what he must have known would be the consequences, he leaped at Karfox.

"You sneaking thief!" he shouted as he leaped.

Karfox's pistol spoke once—Old Johnny Barbold dropped limply to the floor of his cabin.

V

GREAT peak after great peak lifted up into the skyline. Towering, everlasting, they stood out boldly in the crystal sunlight. To Joe Reilly it did not seem at all strange that Johnny Barbold

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would choose to live alone here for fifteen years.

A thousand feet below Joe lay Barbold's cabin, invisible from where he sat. Reilly leaned back on his elbow, the better to enjoy the panorama at ease.

The echo of a shot floated up to him, sharp and clear. He sat up, wondering if Barbold was indulging in more target-practise.

But as no more shots followed, Joe decided this was unlikely. For some reason a feeling of uneasiness came over him, this uneasiness increasing as abrupt thought of the old miner's bag of gold came to him. He listened intently, yet no further sound reached his ear.

Rising to his feet, he peered down the mountainside. At first he beheld nothing strange. And then, through an open space in the trees, far below him and at a little distance north of where the cabin stood, he suddenly perceived two men, leading horses and traveling in haste.

Joe delayed no longer. He sprang down the little path he had ascended.

The ascent had taken Joe a good twenty minutes. But his descent occupied not over a quarter of that time.

The cabin was ominously silent as he approached it. No Johnny was in sight.

Joe bounded through the doorway. Johnny, face to the floor and motionless, lay within.

"Johnny!" called Joe and stooped over him.

There was no answer.

Rolling the old miner over, Joe discerned blood on his gray locks; and looking closer he saw a furrow along the side of Barbold's head, just above the right ear, where, it was obvious, a bullet had plowed its way.

From a bucket, Joe secured a dipper of water. With a towel snatched from a nail above the bucket he bathed the wound; he splashed water on Johnny's face; forced some between Johnny's lips.

Barbold stirred. His eyes opened.

"Johnny!" cried Joe. "What happened? Wake up!"

The bewildered look slowly dissembled from Johnny's eyes. He stared at Joe; and all at once recollection appeared to flutter back to him.

"Two men," he said painfully. "They took my bag."

He struggled to sit erect, his thoughts becoming stronger and clearer.

"They took the bag, Reilly!" he cried, his voice revealing his returning strength. "The bag of gold! I tried to save it, but one of them shot me!"

"I heard the shot," said Joe quickly. "From the top of the hill I got a glimpse of them hurrying off. They each had a horse."

"Which way?" asked Old Johnny swiftly.

"They went north from here—along the mountain."

"North!" exclaimed Johnny. "Then they're aimin' to hit the main trail that'll take 'em over the range."

He sank back with a groan.

"Man, if only I had my right strength I'd get 'em yet!"

"How?" demanded Joe. "Could you head them off? Where?"

Barbold roused himself again.

"The old trail they'll take winds and twists around the mountainside before it gets to the top. It'll take 'em at least a half-hour to make it up. If a man'd take the path you followed he could head 'em off."

"How?" demanded Joe again. "Where does the big trail strike at the top?"

"A hundred yards east from the top of the footpath," replied Johnny. "Just beyond where the two big rocks lie."

Joe scrambled to his feet. He caught up Barbold's rifle.

"Where's the cartridges?" he asked.

From the floor Old Johnny gazed at Joe, a faint new hope showing in his eyes.

"On the shelf beside the door you'll find the box," he said. And when Joe had emptied the cartridges into his pocket, Johnny added— "Are you going to try it?"

"I'm not going to try it," flashed Joe, smiling. "I'm going to do it! Will you be all right till I get back?"

"Run right along," said Johnny. "I can stick it out."

"I'll run," assured Joe, and was gone.

No twenty minutes was required for Joe's second ascent of the foot path. Burdened as he was with the rifle he yet cut the time of his previous trip. He reached the top, turned north and in a moment came in sight of the two big boulders.

Praying that he was not already too late, he pounded on at full speed until he came to the big rocks. True enough, just beyond

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them the faint traces of the old main trail were visible. Panting from his exertions, he threw himself down behind a smaller, waist-high rock and waited.

The click of the iron-shod feet on flinty stones reached Joe first. Then came clearly distinguishable hoof-beats; and in a moment two riders appeared, spurring and urging their mounts to greatest speed.

The riders drew near; came almost abreast of Joe's hiding-place. He shoved his rifle barrel over the top of the boulder and brought the muzzle to bear upon them.

"Put your hands up—high!" he called out. "Put 'em up, I say—quick!"

The horses were drawn back on their haunches. The two riders turned startled eyes at the steady rifle barrel and the head protruding above the rock.

The hands of Gilbert, the first rider, were promptly raised into the air. But Karfox, probably believing the chance was worth the risk, drove spurs into his horse and tried to swing him off the trail and back down the hillside.

Joe's rifle cracked once and Karfox's hat tumbled from his head to the ground.

"Put 'em up!" cried Joe. "The next one will be an inch and a half lower!"

Karfox gave it up. His hands, like Gilbert's, were raised above his hatless head.

"Now you're getting the right idea," observed Joe.

Rifle ready, he stepped from behind his shelter.

Gilbert, keeping his hands raised, turned withering, hot eyes on his partner. Burning, blasphemous words poured from Gilbert's mouth.

"You brainless fool!" he raged. "You thick-skulled jug-head! I warned you! Now look what you've done!"

"Oh, shut your trap," said Karfox sullenly, his thin lips curved in a snarl.

"And then to go and croak that old bird for his measly bag of gold!" raged Gilbert. "Greedy gut! You never were satisfied!"

"If it'll relieve you any," offered Joe, "your friend only came pretty close to doing it. The old-timer isn't dead."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Gilbert.

His relief was obvious.

Joe, close now, looked at Gilbert keenly. And for the first time he now observed that Gilbert's index finger, on the left hand, was missing from first knuckle to tip. In Joe's subconsicous mind something stirred; a thought, an amazing thought, flashed through his head.

"Turn the back of your head around to me!" he abruptly ordered Karfox.

Karfox, clearly surprised, did as instructed. A bald spot, the size of a silver dollar, was revealed on his crown.

Joe looked at Karfox's saddle. Lying in front of the rider, wedged against the cantle, was Old Johnny Barbold's bag of gold. But more than this, Karfox's saddle pouches were bulging, as if filled to capacity.

Joe glanced at Gilbert. His saddle pouches also bulged as if filled to capacity; his feet were large; his hair was dark brown. Remembering that the other man's hair should be sandy, Joe looked again at Karfox; it was.

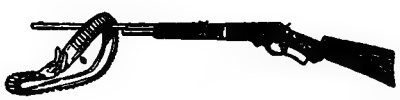
The height of a man on horseback oft-times is deceiving; but Joe, measuring shrewdly length of limb and upper body with his eye, judged that these men just about fitted the heights given in Circular 473.

A slow wide-spreading grin crept over Joseph Reilly's face. His eyes twinkled, recollection of his recent interview with Superintendent Nichols being in his mind.

"You fellows made it a long ways from Whitehorse Cut," he said to the two horsemen who sat helpless before him. "But you didn't make it quite far enough."

With the rifle he made a gesture as a signal for them to remain quiet.

"I'll just take what weapons you've got," he said, "and then we'll get started on the back-trail. Besides the old-timer down here, I know at least one boy on the S. N. W. who'll be mighty glad to see you!"



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"COMMODORE" WEAVER
Shady Adventurer

by
H D Couzens

Author of "Brethren of the Beach," "King Corrigan's Treasure," etc.

SOME years before the present war I was sailing with some friends on a small yacht in Gravesend Bay, New York. We were passing Seagate on the way to the Horseshoe when one of the party pointed out a schooner yacht at anchor. She was well known to us all, so our little sloop put about and we sailed around her as she lay at her anchorage, commenting on her lines and structure with an admiration that was unqualified and unanimous.

She was the keel schooner *Norna*, designed by that prince of yacht architects, A. Cary Smith, and built in a Brooklyn yard in 1879. She was of eighty tons register; ninety-five feet on the waterline and one hundred and fifteen feet over all; a fine, stanch, able cruiser, straining at her cable as if impatient to be off on important ventures, as a thoroughbred strains on the bit just before a race.

I had certain cherished ideas of my own concerning schooners and wild, alien ports, and I regarded the *Norna* covetously. I also gave voice to some of my ideas.

"There," I concluded, "is the ideal boat for a man to adventure in. Aside from seaworthiness and ability she is a thing to be proud of, beautiful as well as able—a gentleman's yacht!"

"Why don't you buy her?" asked one of the party. "I see she is listed at so-and-so's agency," naming the best known yachting agency in the world. That she was listed was a fact though my friend spoke a trifle ironically. I was due on the other side of the world, but it was by way of railroads and iron steamships.

When I next heard of the *Norna* it was many thousand miles away, under strange circumstances. She had had more than her share of adventuring. Her honest hull, of oak and teak, was discredited. She had flown flags she had no right to fly, which might well have been black, with the skull and bones of the Jolly Roger. She was execrated in a dozen ports and libels and attachments were flying along in her wake—an honest craft gone wrong past redemption.

I learned much of these things, but this is not my story. Those who had dealings with the wily skipper of the *Norna* during his cruise of three years do not tell of them directly—at least, not willingly. Rather they sit silent when the subject is under discussion and think of depleted exchequers and ways that are dark and tricks not vain, and vow they will never, never again put their trust in suave, genial yachtsmen, even though they fly commodore flags.

Now this is the story of "Commodore" Nicholas Weaver who, though his methods differed radically from those of Blackbeard and Henry Morgan, was as finished a pirate as ever cut a card-deck or scuttled a bank-account!

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THE GREAT 'ROUND-THE-WORLD ART-SCIENCE-LITERATURE-PLEASURE TRIP

IN THE late Summer of 1896 two gentlemen, father and son, estimable merchants of New York City, were approached by a tall, dark gentleman with a most engaging manner, straightforward speech and a way of looking into the eyes of his listener as he talked that was convincing and at times a trifle disconcerting. Physically he was an athlete, straight as an arrow, with the alertness and vitality that belong only to the outdoor man. He was at once lofty and courteous in bearing and speech—in short, a hearty, dignified, forceful man with large ways and large ideas. He was about forty-five. His name was Nicholas J. Weaver.

He had what appeared to be a most ingenious plan. His fine schooner yacht *Norna*, lately purchased through a well-known agency, was being extensively overhauled to go into commission for an indefinite cruise. The plan was to carry a party of artists, writers, photographers and scientific men around the world, visiting little known and interesting places, exploring the unexplored, and bringing the result before the public through the medium of fine drawings, photographs, articles and stories.

A part of these were to be syndicated and a part used directly by a company which would publish *The Norna Magazine* and also finance the expedition. Weaver, for his part, was to turn in his yacht and sail her himself as executive head of the voyage; the company would manage the rest.

Now there are two almost inconceivable things at this point that may as well be explained. One is that a level-headed person who took the trouble to investigate magazine methods, would put entire confidence in the scheme, plausible and practicable as it may sound; the other, that any one, at that particular period, would accept Weaver at his face value, when a simple telephone investigation would have developed some startling results. The answer to both is contained in a remark by one with whom Weaver subsequently had dealings—

"Let the commodore turn loose his talk, his manner and his statistics and he can charm the birds out of the trees!"

The company was organized. Weaver's statistics and personal charm did the trick. The company left to him many of the important details of the expedition with a confiding trust that, to one who knows the sequel, would seem touching if it were not a wee bit ridiculous. The company really deserves but little sympathy and passes early out of the story. Weaver was a newspaper man and attended to a great part of the publicity.

He was, so he said, negotiating with Rudyard Kipling to go as the writer. Later he said that this could not be arranged and that the late Frank R. Stockton would be the official fictionist of the voyage. The man who eventually filled the position for a few short weeks was neither Mr. Kipling nor Mr. Stockton, but a gentleman from New York City, well known to and esteemed by publishers of magazines and newspapers as well as men who have explored the ends of the earth and added to the world's geographical knowledge. Through no fault of his own his talents remained inoperative and he, too, passes early out of the story; nourishing, to this day, the same lurking respect for certain of Weaver's qualities as that which seems to have affected all of his victims.

The *Norna* sailed in November of 1896. Within the limits of a single article, this is the record of her cruise of three years. A volume would hardly exhaust the interest but, though space is limited, it will not be out of place to glance briefly at a part of Weaver's previous career.

He was the "black sheep" of an estimable Ohio family. At an early age he ran away from home and became a sailor on the Great Lakes, where he learned the rudiments of seamanship. He was, on the *Norna*, a splendid sailor and navigator. After his experience on the Great Lakes, according to stories of his own, he later wandered to Mexico, Southern California and island ports in the Pacific, but there are no details of this part of his roving life. During it he mastered in full the art of living on his wits and that of playing the great game of draw poker from all parts of the deck.

Weaver has been described as handsome, polished and well educated. According to the modern epigrammatists, a rolling stone gathers a polish, but Weaver, from his antecedents, had a *savoir-vivre* that was innate. Superficially, he was "handsome" in a thoroughly masculine way; but his face was too narrow; his ears did not lie close enough;

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his lips, hidden by a heavy mustache, were too full and sensual, his eyes too close together, and he had an abnormally high, narrow forehead.

In reality, he was far from being well educated. This was very obvious and Weaver, himself, deplored it. He had, so he told his friends, once earned enough money to put himself under the tutelage of an old clergyman from whom he acquired all the education he possessed.

In 1895 he was in Minneapolis, where he entered into contract with a local paper to issue a special advertising edition. He had done the same thing successfully a few years before and had no difficulty in obtaining the contract. He was well liked by the manager and one of the owners of the paper, who introduced him into the club circles, where he soon became popular. He received a guest's card, which was renewed from time to time by different members. He spent much time in the card-room and told interesting stories of his adventures and travel. He was accepted as a "good fellow" of the gayer sort who talked entertainingly, was well worth knowing, and who was square.

His wife and small son were with him, and it is to be noted that during his stay in Minneapolis there was never a breath of suspicion against him. His work with the newspaper was so successful that when the edition was completed he received strong letters of introduction and recommendation to the editors of a paper in Philadelphia and one in Boston—two of the best known journals in this country.

Weaver had made good. He could have continued his success, honestly and loyally. He had all the qualifications, but—mark the sequel!

THE WEAVER "INTERNATIONAL EDITION"

A CONTRACT was given him for a special edition by the Philadelphia paper, and another by the Boston paper for an "International Edition" to be printed in several languages, on terms so favorable that, as one of the men interested says, "He might be working it yet." So great was the trust he inspired that the right was given him to collect payments in advance in the name of the papers, and no date of publication was specified in his contracts.

He came to New York and engaged a suite of rooms at the Waldorf, representing himself as the commissioner of the Boston paper; hired a staff of writers and artists, and became very busy with advertisers and others interested in the special editions. He entertained most lavishly, and was a connoisseur of the nice things belonging to that section of the city. Men who have had to fight for daily bread always are.

How much money he collected from advertisers and others is uncertain. Thirty-five thousand dollars as representative of the Boston paper and six thousand on behalf of the Philadelphia sheet are the figures that have been furnished, but it may have been more. No accounting was rendered, and in time, his activities having lapsed, and there being no signs of publication imminent of those celebrated special editions, the papers interested became uneasy and called for particulars.

Meantime, Weaver had acquired the *Norna* and made several short cruises with parties aboard. Wine flowed in the cabin and cards were played—always the great American game of draw poker. Usually the guests left the anchorage poorer than when they came. Yachting is an expensive luxury; one must make ends meet.

Then, from a little cloud of suspicion, no bigger than a man's hand, a storm began brewing. From a mere murmur it rose to a clamor, and the burden was—

"What, why and when about those special editions?"

Weaver, calm, unruffled, immaculate in his new yachting togs, with a few private flags in his locker for future use that had no business there, went serenely about his affairs. One of the Minneapolis men who had stood his sponsor in letters to the Eastern publishers and was also the son of one of the proprietors of the Boston paper, visited him at the Waldorf, indignant and suspicious, and urged Weaver to make good. It was high time for the subject matter of the special editions to be turned over for publication.

And yet, so eloquent was Weaver, so winning and persuasive, that this gentleman not only accepted his excuses for delay but gave them his personal indorsement.

Even today, knowing Weaver's utter depravity and faithlessness, he can not withhold a genuine liking and admiration for the man. It is a queer world and there is food for reflection in the question of the value of

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externals. A dominating vitality will carry a man further than the virtues of all the saints; and this is what seems to have carried Weaver triumphantly on his way.

The Philadelphia paper repudiated Weaver as a swindler and ordered his arrest. Later, on a brief return to New York, he was actually arrested on the charge and detained for forty-eight hours, when he was released, no one appearing against him.

He had, in the meantime, organized his *Norna Magazine* company and sailed away. There were no scientists aboard; no writers; no artists. There was one photographer, however. Other members of the party were to join the schooner later.

The first stop of the *Norna* on her edifying cruise was at Newport News. Things began to happen at once. Scarcely was the mudhook down than an attachment was served on the yacht for three thousand dollars' worth of repairs which Weaver had neglected paying for in New York. Weaver was at low-ebb in all but resourcefulness. The money must be paid or the great educational scheme go to the four winds. Therefore it was paid—as follows:

There was a doctor in Newport News whose acquaintance Weaver made, who came as a guest aboard the *Norna*. He did not care for draw poker. He was, however, deeply interested in the cruise of the *Norna* and its object. The worthy doctor had five thousand dollars, the savings of years of honorable practise. His interest in the voyage was not discouraged.

It transpired that a surgeon was needed. Of course—of course! How had Weaver come to overlook so important a matter in the first place? The doctor was appointed official surgeon forthwith—by Weaver. The terms were that he was to have a percentage of all proceeds of the cruise, was to be paid a salary and—he was to invest his dearly won five thousand. They were gratefully accepted by him. The money was paid over—and then the *Norna* sailed away without the doctor! The attachment, however, was liquidated.

"COMMODORE" WEAVER NOW

THE next stop was at Hamilton, Bermuda, where the *Norna* remained for about three weeks. The commodore—he was now hailed, by request, as a full-fledged commodore, though he had never held executive office in any yacht club—made many friends. It is really wonderful what a man can do with a personality and a fine schooner yacht in an island or a seaport community.

Bermuda is devoted to yachting. They also play cards there a good deal; and Weaver was taken in by the local yacht club with open arms. Later the yacht club—but wait a while! There were entertainments afloat and ashore, with the inevitable card games. Large quantities of supplies, uniforms and equipment, were ordered and sent aboard. It was, in the diction of slang, a most suspicious occasion.

Weaver now made a flying trip to New York, for "urgent business reasons," as he explained. He was accompanied, on his return to the tight little island, by a handsome young woman whom he introduced as his sister. In referring to this incident we may emulate the courtesy of a Yokohama newspaper which, commenting on Weaver's hasty departure, said, with characteristic politeness—

"With Mr. Weaver was a lady who, however, has little to do with the story."

This was three years later, but we shall not bring the lady into the story except to shed, at this point, a light on the darkest side of Weaver's character. Soon after his return to Bermuda, Mrs. Nicholas J. Weaver, wife of the so-styled commodore, perished, in absolute want, in a room in Thirty-fifth Street in New York City. She is said to have starved to death!

Then, one dark night, between two days, as the saying is, the *Norna* spread her wings and left the shores of Bermuda forever. With characteristic carelessness Weaver had neglected to settle up with the tradesmen who had sent him the supplies. How many other debts he left unpaid and what he took in by manipulating poker hands will never be known. They are good sportsmen in Bermuda.

The *Norna* crossed the Atlantic to the Azores. The official writer of the cruise, who had crossed by steamer, met the yacht at Fayal. They cruised about for a while among the islands, the commodore, as usual, making friends wherever he went. At Ponta del Garda he found a friend in the United States consular agent, who cashed a draft for a considerable sum, which—but then consuls grow used to that sort of thing, poor fellows!

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At the same port Weaver also struck up a warm regard for two young Americans, who were on a pleasure trip. He invited them to go in the *Norna* as far as Madeira, probably estimating that their available funds would last about that far. They played poker. To the astute reader no more need be said.

There were other passengers on short cruises, one of them a priest, who paid tribute for the privilege of the genial commodore's society. One thing was noted by the guests, and that was the high order of Weaver's seamanship. The soul of urbanity toward any one else, he was the veriest martinet to his crew, who jumped to stations with the alacrity of man-o'-war's-men.

Never was there a thing mislaid or fouled; the yacht was always spick and span and at her prettiest, with Weaver the dominating influence over all, and in the light of later events this was rather remarkable; for while the yacht was always perfectly equipped and manned there were times when Weaver must have been very hard put to make ends meet. That he succeeded shows considerable force of character.

Meanwhile, the writer and photographer had begun to take note of certain things aboard. The yacht proceeded to Mogador in Morocco, and thence to Mazagan; and was joined by the father and son who represented the principal end of the syndicate. They, too, had scented the fact that something was tainted in the State of Denmark. They had honored drafts, but so far there was no visible sign of any returns from the much advertised cruise around the world. Weaver alone seemed to be serenely satisfied, to be having a good time and getting results, both directly and indirectly, from the investment, although his style of living kept him in continual want of money.

In Morocco the members of the party were, for a time, guests of the well-known Sir George MacL——, a kindly, courteous host whose hospitality was boundless. Yet such was the monumental cheek of Weaver that when the *Norna* arrived at Gibraltar from Mazagan he proceeded to cash a draft for one hundred pounds on their late host.

This was too much. The syndicate learned of the transaction and there was a meeting in the cabin that had all the semblance of an informal court martial. It was a show-down for the commodore in which, for once, he held the losing hand. The syndicate was disbanded, without delay, after some high words, and Commodore Weaver was left to set forth on his own resources, which at the time were nothing.

AFTER THE SYNDICATE

WAS he dismayed, or even abashed, over this untoward turn of events? He was not. He weighed anchor, smiling a debonair smile, as urbane as ever, and blithely waved farewell to the frowning fortress. The world was his oyster; and the little *Norna*, his own nimble wit and deft fingers represented, in composite, an effective oyster-knife.

Figuratively nailing a small black flag to his main truck, he set sail for England and anchored at Portsmouth in the midst of a great fleet gathered to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee. The holiday spirit was prevalent everywhere. Things were looking up! Turning the lucky penny in his left-hand trouser pocket the bold commodore took heart.

Nonchalantly ordering a new suit of sails for the *Norna*, and leaving her in drydock to be overhauled, scraped and painted, he departed for London where he arrived as it were, amid the clash of trumpets and cymbals. He took a suite at the Hotel Cecil, where he made no bones of the fact that he was an American millionaire to whom money was no object. He lived extravagantly and let it be understood, discreetly, that his physician had prescribed a three-year cruise on his yacht, but after a few months of voyaging he felt himself once more and was anxious to enter active life again at once.

To a chosen few of his acquaintances he explained that he was about to start a paper in London on American lines, and had already ordered presses and other properties. Soon, very soon, he would be prepared to organize his large force, start the paper and stir things up in London—a city which has always taken kindly to American millionaires with new and stirring enterprises.

While his gigantic issues were pending Weaver made up several parties of wealthy friends for short cruises in the newly adorned little *Norna*. Again we arrive at the rather tiresome repetition of wine flowing freely and the inevitable card games. Told in cold type and shorn of details it

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sounds like a commonplace and vulgar business. But there were accessories that the mind can well conceive—quarrels and suspicions that led close to tragedy; and the commodore, grasping at straws, playing on a "shoe-string," lean as a hungry wolf, smiled and smiled and carried it all with a high hand, licking his lips over each successful coup.

One can see how his victims, holding no brief for "Nick" Weaver, still see something admirable in the indomitable spirit that could play a lone hand like this and win or lose with the same urbane smile.

For there were parlous times. The yacht was seized for debt for the supplies so lavishly ordered. It was touch and go, and there were occasions when so much as the quiver of an eyelash might have lost him the yacht or landed the spurious commodore in jail. Yet through it all he prospered. He saved his face, as they say in the Orient, satisfied his creditors, maintained his assumed rôle till the last, and made the usual unexpected departure—which, in certain circles, is called the "getaway."

He sailed through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal to the Red Sea, where, after some months of total obscurity, he was reported as lost. But the stanch little *Norna*, ably handled as she was, braved the terrors of the monsoon and the hot, baffling gales of the Indian Ocean, and was next heard of at Colombo, Ceylon; then at Sumatra and Singapore.

At each place the story was the same. Worthless drafts were honored by credulous acquaintances; pigeons were plucked at poker games, maudlin over the cabin table; and tradesmen who had furnished supplies on credit awoke to the cold realization that the *Norna* and her plausible skipper had unexpectedly moved on to a new anchorage.

In the Far Eastern ports Weaver did not scruple to fly—nay, to flaunt, flags of the two great yacht clubs of New York and to represent himself as a commodore. People in the islands and colonies take a mighty interest in ships for many reasons. They bring news from "home" and from other ports; they bring necessities of life, sometimes—and luxuries, not the least of which are the new faces and acquaintances that lend variety to the drab lives of the white exiles of the Orient. They of the clubs, especially, may be ignorant of the "Yachting Register," but they appreciate the advent of a fine schooner yacht dignified by the flag of a commodore. They do not ask too many questions. Weaver was, of course, prepared to face any challenge convincingly.

Here enters a "friend" of Weaver's who became, as a despoiler, quite as prominent as the commodore. There were, in fact, two friends, one of them a charming woman, French by birth; but we may allow, as of the other lady mentioned, that she has "little to do with the story." We may call them Mr. and Mrs. Pearce, which is as near as possible to the names they actually used.

The man was the large, bland type of ultra-British Briton, monocled and tubbed and of the exterior invariably described as "well-groomed." Heaven only knows why a well-dressed Englishman should be so portrayed, as if he had but just stepped out of a box-stall. I fancy they owe it to the daily press; but this is a digression.

They did not travel on the *Norna*. The business of a capper demands more finesse and mystery. Mr. and Mrs. Pearce usually sailed ahead of the yacht, by steamer. Then there might be two modes of procedure. The yacht, having reached a new port, would anchor with her usual display. Pearce, having already established himself, would fall upon the neck of his dear old friend the commodore in a manner quite touching; two old friends would be reunited and the commodore vouched for and introduced. Or, it might be, if conditions suited, that Weaver would be introduced to some club by a homesick and enthusiastic guarantor, and here he and Pearce would be formally introduced in time, strike up an eternal friendship—and the rest would be easy. The latter method was the more artistic.

You can easily see that there was nothing original in all this. It was the plain, unvarnished way of the old-time confidence man. But there is a difference in the thing being done in a crowded city and in a foreign port, among nostalgic expatriates, with a very fine yacht as one of the properties. Taken with a personality such as Weaver's no further credentials are necessary.

THE FIELD OF OPERATIONS NARROWS

AND yet, clever as Weaver was, he was working under a bad system, if one may qualify his actions at all. He was too greedy. He must have it all—pluck his

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birds of the last pin-feather—shear his sheep of the last strand of wool, and sail away with a laugh of derision at the mourners left behind. Every port he left was a door closed to him forever after; and the world is small, and seaport communities few in number.

Had he been less ruthless and insatiable and carried things with not so high a hand he might have flourished indefinitely and still found a welcome among the people whose confidence he gained and brutally abused. He seemed not to care—to be utterly reckless. For the fact that once he left a port his assumed character of a gentleman was gone forever, bothered him not a whit. He was sailing the *Norna* for all she was worth and flinging his ill-gotten money away in ridiculous extravagances.

He was brave enough, with a kind of shameless courage, and had a boundless contempt for his fellow-man. The confidences he abused were those of men whom he had first made his friends. Considered purely in the abstract, it seems to me that the spectacle of the gigantic ruffian, "Bully" Hayes, sobbing in his cabin over some friend whom he had playfully murdered, is less atrocious than that of this man, heaving anchor under cover of darkness and sailing away with a sneer on his lips for those whose bread and salt he had accepted and then whom he had cheerfully despoiled. There is, at least, in the case of Hayes, a rather absurd touch of casuistry.

At Hongkong, which is British territory, they found fruitful soil—fortunately for Weaver, for now his field of operation had grown very small indeed. But here, as usual, greed prevailed and they overdid it. Even the colonial Britisher is capable of growing suspicious in time. After a while the society of Weaver and Pearce began to pall. Things were being said. Newspapers in different parts of the world were finding incidents in Weaver's wake that made excellent copy, and Hongkong is an island that keeps fairly well up to date. And so the *Norna* sailed away—hastily, as usual—while the Pearces departed by steamer.

The Pearces arrived in Yokohama on the steamer *Kolu Maru*, on June 10th, 1899, and soon after the *Norna*, jauntily flying the flag of the New York Yacht Club, came dancing into Tokyo Bay, rounded to an anchorage at Yokohama, fired her gun and swung out her boat boom, all with the precision and dispatch of the flagship of a fleet. A hastily formed committee of welcome met the visitor. Two well-known American residents of Yokohama put Weaver up at their club, and here he "met" the bland, slow-moving, fascinating Mr. Pearce. Naturally they became fast friends.

All of Yokohama that was interested took note of it, and two gentlemen of such charm and distinction, with their extraordinary facility in signing *chits*, or I. O. U's, could not fail of popularity. The *chit* system is, and always has been, overdone in the Far East. It is a continual temptation to the weak-minded, a source of worry to the conscientious man of small means, and a joy to the casual grafter.

Weaver studied this new circle of friends carefully. When he had a fair working knowledge of them and their resources he chose guests with nice discrimination and entertained aboard the *Norna* as befitted the representative of a great yacht club. Invitations were at a premium. To receive one was a mark of distinction. The *Japan Daily Herald*, referring to Weaver after his departure, naïvely said—

"Given a good address, social adaptability, plenty of assurance and a fertile imagination, and it is not difficult for a perfect stranger to live in Yokohama for a few months."

But Weaver more than lived. He luxuriated—at the expense of Yokohama's citizens.

The *Daily Herald* also said:

"A poker atmosphere pervaded everything in Messrs. Weaver and P——'s (correct name) vicinity; nor were they ever particular as to limit—with or without, they were equally complacent."

But poker was not all, nor half of the story. Because of the reticence of the men who will not "squeal" which, be it said, is more from shame than loyalty—the number of worthless drafts cashed, loans negotiated and *chits* unpaid will never be known. Weaver's operations in Yokohama were so extensive that something of them was later whispered 'round the world.

And then a strange thing occurred.

Weaver had been in Yokohama nearly two months when one morning his creditors and guarantors awoke to find nothing but a hole in the anchorage where the *Norna* had

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been. Once again she had left between two days, her honest fabric of oak and teak now far, far beyond the pale of respectability, with a name and reputation that would stick till her bones were picked in RottenRow.

The Pearces remained in Yokohama—and here is the nub of the story: they had no money! Pearce had not even the wherewithal to shake the dust of Yokohama from his shifty feet! Had Weaver, false to employers, friends, hosts, guests and guarantors, rounded on his "pal"? You may draw your own inferences. I can only give you Pearce's tale as he told it, and then he, in his turn, passes out of the story.

Very, very depressed and chagrined, apparently, he took upon himself the rôle of chief mourner. Weaver, he said, owed him vast sums of money. Perhaps it was true. You remember about Weaver's ability to charm birds out of trees; and Pearce, none too clever at best, was no match for the wily Weaver. He tried to realize something by stating that he held a bottomry bond on the *Norna* for five hundred and fifty pounds, sterling; but here the law of the land had an inning.

The statute provides that the last bond has precedence over all others and must be held, with the ship's papers, by the creditors, and there were later bonds—and the *Norna* was far, far away, with her papers safe aboard. No one would indorse Pearce's note or his check. He had fallen suddenly on lean times. However, Mrs. Pearce had jewels. A certain globe-trotter proved the *deus ex machinâ;* and then the Pearces went away from there.

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS AND—THE END

AND now the field had narrowed indeed for Commodore Weaver. Honolulu has always been noted for its hospitality, but there was not much poker money lying around loose. As for cashing drafts and making unsecured loans, the Island City has had far too many lessons to be in the easy class. They cut wisdom teeth at an early age in Honolulu, and they had been reading the American newspapers. Here, too, an attachment hove in sight from Yokohama—not Mr. Pearce's, by the way—and all in all it began to look squally for the little *Norna*, lying peacefully at anchor near the lighthouse, on the outskirts of "Hoodoo Row."

Weaver, after telling a reporter of the *Honolulu Advertiser*, in strict confidence, that the attachment was a deep-laid scheme to "blacken his good name" took steamer for San Francisco. The *Norna* remained at her anchorage, by request, but when Weaver returned, soon after, he had money to settle all claims, and the yacht was released. Entertainments of the milder sort took place aboard, but Weaver had had to pay out good money and it hurt. The pressure had been very strong indeed, and he could not recoup, in Honolulu, by the ordinary methods. However, there are ways and means.

Not long before Weaver's arrival, there had been an extraordinary activity in sugar stocks. The Islands had been formally annexed, corporations were formed, and all danger of the Reciprocity Treaty being repealed was past. Therefore people made and lost money in sugar stocks very swiftly. There was a young man who, as broker, had been one of the fortunate ones. I wish I could tell his name and something about him, for he was somewhat of a character in himself, but I must limit this to the main facts. He was a good "spender" and from this doubtful virtue and his immaculate dress had earned the nickname of "Prince." He had made a great deal of money—and he fell under the spell of Weaver.

So much so that when the *Norna* sailed away for the south, with Weaver and the dark, handsome lady—who had ceased to be the "sister" by the way, and was now the "sister-in-law"—the prince was aboard as a passenger.

He left the yacht at Apia, went to Australia by steamer, and from there returned to Honolulu. What happened on the short voyage I never could learn. The prince merely admitted that there had been some poker; that he had lent Weaver considerable money and—that the commodore was a "great man." Still, the prince went on to Australia and Weaver stayed a while, negotiating for the purchase of ten thousand acres of land from native chiefs.

He was, he said, going to start the largest cacao plantation in the world. Cacao, the plant from which the cocoa and chocolate of commerce are made, is very valuable as a crop, bringing in large returns. Weaver's interest in this was undoubtedly genuine. The scheme was practicable and he probably meant to do what he planned. It was

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here that he saw a sheet anchor to windward when his regular methods played out; and it was here, later, that he died, working in the interest of another man.

Still, the plan was not yet crystalized. Another "syndicate" had to be formed. Meanwhile there remained, if not other worlds, at least a few alleys and byways of promise to be conquered by the regular process. So Weaver set sail for New Zealand. He had letters to prominent people in Auckland and was received with kindness and good-fellowship. They are keen yachtsmen in Auckland, as in Bermuda, and hospitable to the last degree. The *Norna*, with her fine lines and sterling construction, was appreciated by competent critics and appointed flagship of the local yacht squadron. It was honor enough.

The colonial town was kindness personified and Weaver, his new-formed Samoan plans in his head, might have prospered, let us say, honestly—or with perhaps just a few games in the *Norna's* cabin in which he held slightly better hands than his opponents. But it was not so ordered, and this is the last chapter in the history of the *Norna*.

Heretofore, Weaver had confined his operations to men. He had rooked them at cards, hoodwinked them into cashing drafts and played on their credulity as a harpist on his instrument, because, when the worst comes, men, as a rule, do not "squeal." At Auckland he overreached himself by trying to gull a woman who learned something of his appaling duplicity —and she squealed. It was an outraged, feminine squeal that compelled attention. With libels, attachments and other forms of maritime hedges closing 'round him Weaver threw up the sponge and quit. The cruise of the *Norna* was over. She was to become a ferry-boat and later, tradition has it, a pearler. She was sold under the hammer.

Weaver, loudly protesting that remittances from New York were awaiting him at Sydney, took a steamer for that port; but he never appeared to reclaim the yacht. He did, however, appear again in Samoa, passing through Honolulu on the steamship *Alameda* on January 15th, 1901, registered as "N. M. Weaver and valet," and it was in Samoa that he died, a few years ago, trying, as he said at the time, to live an honest life.

Take it altogether, there have been few careers as remarkable as that of this genial freebooter. He had qualities that make for success far beyond those of the average man, and opportunities were thrown his way; yet it seemed that he positively could not be straight.

Perhaps you recall that rather sniveling tale, "Rodolphus," that parents, a generation ago, used to read us as a warning. I have always thought that Weaver must have been just such a lad as the young moral pervert of the story in his early days. Men do queer things in schooners and there are many of the present age whose deeds are food for gossip and speculation, yet I think Weaver stands apart from them all for sheer heartlessness.

The ruffians of the South Seas had a certain rude code that passed for honor among friends—often violated, to be sure, but still extant. Weaver, however, seemed to scorn all obligations and prey upon those who most befriended him. He had courage, many talents, and an exceptional charm that to this day mitigates his offenses in the eyes of his victims; yet he chose to use them all, despicably, in the sole interest of Nicholas J. Weaver.

FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW

BY CHAS. C. JONES

IF YOU'VE made your camp where the sun goes down at the edge of God-knows-where,
With a chap or two from your own home town, both the sport and work to share,
You have learned one test of a true man's soul, and you know as by the book,
You can stick to him who's the same old Jim when it's come his turn to cook!

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THE WESTERN DOOR SWINGS OPEN

by Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Red Sticks," "The Ways of Mountain Men," etc.

THERE were blind men lost in the wilderness of the great Northwest in the year of our Lord, 1762. They dwelt behind wooden walls with the red flag of old England flying over their heads. Some were at Fort Michilimackinac, on the Strait of Mackinac, guarding the waterway between Michigan and Huron, through which the fur trade flowed. Some were stationed north of the Strait at Sault Ste. Marie. Some held the Western post of Fort La Baye on Green Bay. In the South at Fort Detroit were other blind men.

Around these scattered garrisons and throughout the wild country extending to the frontier along the Alleghanys were a myriad seeing eyes, alert and ferocious. Not only did the far-flung posts fail to see the red tide creeping through the ancient forests, but men safely housed behind the frontier and occupying high positions of trust were also blind.

In fact, since the English took over the French forts in 1760 this inexplicable myopia obsessed those leaders who should have been most vigilant to scent the impending ruin. This disastrous condition of affairs was evidenced by the niggardly and neglectful policy of the Government in dealing with the restless savages. There was a man, Sir William Johnson of Johnson Hall on the Mohawk, whose vision was of crystal clearness and whose inner gaze searched from effect to cause and who read the warning in the western sky. And there were others who having eyes made use of them.

But the rank and file of the army were deaf as well as blind and could not hear the frantic admonitions. It was the same blindness that had led Braddock to his death seven years before at the bloody field on the Monongahela. Instead of continuing the persuasive policy of the French, the English persisted in a stupid and fatal exhibition of contempt toward the Indians.

And blindest of all, perhaps, was Lord Jeffrey Amherst, commander-in-chief of the provincial forces. When finesse and diplomacy and liberal distribution of trinkets would have stayed many a savage foray he wrote Colonel Bouquet, of the "Royal American Regiment"—

"I wish to hear of no prisoners."

This strange incapacity to realize the danger hovering over the land was to be paid for many times in blood and torture. For the Autumn of 1762 found the forests alive with wolfish eyes that saw every little weakness and act of carelessness, that beheld forts manned by feebled garrisons recently invalided home from the West Indies, that sparkled with triumph at the indifference and short-sightedness of officers and men.

It would be difficult for the modern mind to conceive of the isolation of Fort Michilimackinac when the first frosts began painting the hardwood growth in that eventful year. Never again will the like of those endless, somber forests be seen, nor the emptiness of the vast fresh water seas, banked to the water with moss-covered firs. At rare intervals a trader's flotilla skirted

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the shores, or a solitary sail timidly ventured along a desolate coast but dared not anchor except under the guns of a fort.

Death stalked the damp darkness of the woods and lurked along the melancholy shores. Yet even with Nature inciting one's thoughts to suspicion and urging watchfulness, commander and soldier remained blind to the fate about to overwhelm and destroy. England knew France had lost the continent, but she could not comprehend that the Indian remained to be dealt with.

Besides the soldiers, at Michilimackinac there were Canadians who were hostile to the English, and the ever shifting groups of Indians. The last usually were Ojibways from the Island of Mackinaw, or Ottawas from L'Arbre Croche on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan.

ROGER BESSE, a scout for young George Washington's Virginians at Braddock's defeat, now a trader and wise to the ways of the Indian, had reflected much on the possibility of a general uprising during his two weeks' voyage to the fort. When at Detroit he had noted the Indians were in a sullen mood and given to holding secret councils in the forests. No sooner did he land at Michilimackinac than he began to fear an extensive evil, one with a powerful mind behind it. This frame of mind was induced by the insolent behavior of a mixed party of Ojibways and Ottawas, who crowded about him as he leaped from his canoe.

The Ojibways, their faces blackened with charcoal, their bodies naked to the clout and painted with white designs, presented a picture of savagry uninfluenced by contact with the whites. Although one of the largest tribes on the continent they had figured but little in Colonial history because of their remoteness from the frontier.

They made no effort to mask their illwill, and lowered on the trader with all the fierceness of their Northern timber wolves. As Besse gave his orders for unloading the boats he noted more than one hand stealing to knife and tomahawk. They were of the nation that had stopped the westward expansion of the mighty Iroquois, and were in the van of the fighting on the Monongahela. The Ottawas with their gaudy blankets, guns and many trade trinkets reflected the effect of frontier civilization and were more circumspect in their bearing.

Affecting a nonchalance he did not feel the trader turned his back on the group and continued giving his orders to the boatmen. An Ojibway chief, known throughout both the Michigan peninsulars as the "Killer," crowded before him and abruptly began:

"Englishman, these lakes and woods belong to us. The French king is our father and when you made war against him you became our enemy."

"The French and English kings have buried the hatchet very deep. White wampum hangs between them," replied Besse.

"Englishman, your king stole Canada but you have not conquered the Indians. The Three Fires burn very strong (Ojibway, Ottawa and Potawatomi). You have killed many of our young men. Their spirits wail about Michilimackinac and can not travel the broad trail to the west till the blood of their slayers has been spilled, or their bodies have been covered." And he paused and pointed to the bales of goods.

This effort to frighten him under the very guns of an English fort spoke volumes to one so well versed in Indian character. "To cover the bodies" was the figurative for appeasing the mourners with many gifts, and the veiled demand was equivalent to conscription of all his goods. He boldly retorted:

"If the bodies of your dead must be covered go to the fort and give your talk to the soldiers. I am a trader. I have slain none of your young men. I come here from trading with your kinsmen, the Potawatomi. They did not ask me to cover the bodies of their dead. We smoked the pipe and I gave them presents. The Ojibway and Ottawa must smoke the pipe with me before I make them presents."

The Killer's face filled with fury. Unused to checking his passions he dropped his hand to his ax. Besse held his gaze steadily and dropped his rifle into the hollow of his left arm, the muzzle of the long barrel within a few inches of the chief's breast. An Ottawa, more politic, pressed to the Killer's side and murmured something below his breath. With a snarl the chief lowered his hand, and said:

"Englishman, your king has sent us no presents. He has made no treaty with us.

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You are very foolish to say you will not cover the bodies of the dead."

"I will make you no gifts, Ojibway. If you come a step nearer I shall fire. If I must walk the broad trail to the west you shall go before me." And he cocked the rifle.

The Ottawa spoke up, adopting a persuasive tone:

"We must have goods. Open your packs. After a snow has come and gone we will pay for them. The French traders always waited for their pay."

Besse appreciated the fact it required but one misplay to precipitate his death. Already his Canadians had drawn one side and were enjoying his predicament. He knew they would not lift a hand to save him. From the tail of his eye he saw several soldiers cleaning a small cannon on the roof of the fort. He pointed to them and reminded:

"The English speak with a loud voice when one of their nation is harmed. Kill me and take to your canoes and though you make Mackinaw the big gun will find you and kill you all. Stand out of my path."

He capped the climax by advancing boldly. The Indians hesitated, then sullenly gave ground.

The incident convinced him the time was near when the war-whoop would resound and blood would flow about Michilimackinac. Depressed and worried he entered the fort and sought Captain Etherington, the commandant, briefly reported the matter, and concluded with declaring his firm belief that the post was marked for destruction.

"Indians always want presents. Why the devil didn't you give them some?" was the impatient reply. "Now, remember this, Besse; if you report any more nonsense to stir up this garrison I'll send you a prisoner to Detroit."

Half a century later a blind American officer, commanding Fort Mims, was to order a negro trussed up and whipped because he reported seeing strange Indians lurking about the fort; and a thousand Creeks were to rush in and massacre nearly six hundred men, women and children while the sentence on the negro was being carried out.

Besse withdrew in disgust to the beach. His goods had not been disturbed and the Indians had vanished. His mind quickly reached a decision. Ordering the Canadians to carry the packs inside the fort he paid them off and proceeded to place arms and food in a canoe.

"Blind as a mole," he muttered as he bowed his head to the chill wind and paddled toward the white cliffs of Mackinaw. "Woods full of Injuns hacking the war-post an' two score soldiers sleep soundly an' think nothing will happen. But there's a man back on the Mohawk who'll listen an' look sharp. A long trip, but it's death to stay here. The red devils'll git my goods but they sha'n't git my hair."

Rough water was kicking up the strait when he doubled the point with the large island of Bois Blanc on his left. Gray clouds pressed low. There was no pleasure in contemplating the gay dress of the deciduous trees. The red of the maple was symbolic of war-paint and the blood soon to be shed. The lowering clouds grew darker, as though surcharged with ink. To Besse it was an omen of Death flapping across the peninsular.

He believed those who kept their eyes open could find warnings of direful events. He believed the stories told him by old men in New England, who said the early settlers saw a scalp painted on the moon just before Philip took his last hunt with his Narragansett braves. These clouds tenting the horizons were no mere harbingers of wind and rain; they were the reflection of the black passions hidden in the forests.

HE HAD replenished his supplies at Fort Sandusky and had made the mouth of the Cuyahoga and was preparing to camp for the night. After clearing the Detroit River and entering the blue expanse of the Erie the feeling of depression and fear had gradually slipped from him. He was approaching the country of the Six Nations, a terrane and people he was somewhat experienced with. He believed he would be cordially welcomed by any tribe of the Long House, for Sir William Johnson had gained a mighty influence over the league, and any messenger to him should have safe conduct.

But as he placed his blankets in a secluded cove and made ready to pot some of the wild geese honking down through the dusk to rest and feed he was aroused to the possibility of danger as the birds on the western side of a narrow point left the water as though frightened. Leaving the small pile

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of dried sticks unlighted he slipped into the forest and scouted back toward the source of the alarm. He heard a canoe grate softly on the sand and crawling forward was in time to see a figure leap out.

White or red? He did not fear one man although there was a quality of resolution and confidence in this newcomer's bearing that warned him it were best to proceed cautiously.

"Moves like a white man, so all-fired sure," he muttered as he sought to inventory the stranger through the thickening gloom. "But if I had my old dog here I bet he'd smell Injun. Look him over, Roger. Always find out what's behind you."

A bit of fire crackled and glowed and told him the stranger had no suspicion of his presence. He waited till the figure squatted before the fire and the odor of roasting fish came to his nostrils. It angered him to smell the fish when his own stomach was empty. He maneuvered till he had the fire between him and the figure. The man's face was now revealed and the trader experienced a strange sensation as he recognized the savage countenance of the Killer. Why should the Ojibway chief leave his people at Michilimackinac and traverse the Huron and Erie?

"He's trailing me to kill me," was Besse's first thought.

A moment's reflection convinced him this explanation was both egotistical and absurd. Had the Ojibway desired his death he would have killed him on the beach, under the very guns of the fort, when he refused to cover the bodies of the Ojibway dead with gifts. The Killer had no need to trail a solitary trader for weeks to enhance his renown. That was work for young braves hungry for glory, good sport and practise for warriors in the making. If some general uprising were brewing a leader of the Killer's caliber would not leave his people except on an errand of imperative importance.

Besse nibbled at the problem thoughtfully, his gaze never leaving the squat figure. The Ojibway placed a handful of fuel on the coals and produced something from a roll of skin and examined it solicitously. The trader's eyes narrowed and he gently pushed his rifle forward.

The Killer carried belts of wampum. They were not like the strings of trade-wampum the trader had tied about his waist, but something which must be guarded and protected. Yes; it was a huge belt the Indian was carefully arranging before the fire to dry. And the Killer never carried white belts. He was on a war mission, war against the English.

"Cussed if it don't all fit in," Besse told himself. "He come down to line up the Wyandots, an' having added them to the Three Fires he'll cut down the Cuyahoga to the Delawares an' Shawanoes (Shawnees). He's peddling black belts, —— him! Good place for him to stop is right here."

Sighting his piece he cocked it and pulled the trigger.

The gun failed to explode and the sharp click sent the Killer backward into the bush as though shot from a catapult. The tables were instantly reversed. With a worthless gun and his presence discovered the trader knew he was in imminent peril. The Killer's uncanny knack of stalking a victim was celebrated throughout the Northwest. As the Indian vanished the trader began his retreat.

He reached his canoe and gently placed it in the water and pushed off, hugging the shore to keep within the black shadows. Not till morning did he cease paddling. Going ashore he caught fish and roasted them over a tiny fire, then rolled in his blankets and slept for hours.

It was past midday when he awoke. The Killer by this time had found the mark of his canoe in the cove but could only guess as to the direction of his flight. Being bent on a war mission he scarcely would bother to make a wide search for his unseen assailant and by this time would be on his way to the Delaware country. The discovery of the Ojibway spurred Besse on to get word to Sir William with the least delay.

He had intended to make Oswego on Lake Ontario and follow the line of military posts which guarded the country from that port to Albany on the Hudson. This route would permit him to travel by water for much of the way, as he could pass up the Oswego River to Oneida Lake, pass over to Wood Creek and tap the Mohawk. But lake travel suddenly appealed to him as being very hazardous.

He decided to leave the lake at Fort Presqu' Isle and follow up the head waters of the Alleghany to the Genesee or a tributary of the Susquehanna. He knew the

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ground and felt confident he could pass through the Iroquois country to the Mohawk trail without being detected. Even if he did run into any Indians of the Six Nations he believed he would be permitted to proceed, especially when it was learned he carried a talk to Sir William.

THE most western English settlement in the province of New York at this time was German Flats on the Mohawk. A baker's dozen of dots on the map would have accounted for all the forts and settlements in the province, with eight of these placed on the Hudson and Lakes George and Champlain. The country was densely timbered and held by the people of the Long House. The Mohawks, firmly held in hand by Sir William Johnson, guarded the Eastern Door, while the Senecas stood sentinel over the Great Black Doorway in the West.

The reputation of the Six Nations for courage and ferocity had allowed them to conquer nearly all of the country east of the Mississippi, although at the zenith of their fighting fame they boasted only of some four thousand warriors. Their terrible prowess discouraged any influx of settlers.

Even the forest rangers who entered the country carried themselves differently than when traversing the territory of any other nation. The influence which worked upon them, however, was more subtle than the fear of capture and torture, and consisted of the sinister spell cast upon the gloomy woods by the pagan myths of the savages. Possibly the folk lore of no Indian nation included so much of the gruesome and horrible as did the myths of the Iroquois.

Besse, like the general run of his kind, had absorbed much of the superstitions of the land. The lakes were not like other lakes, but were enveloped with a supernatural atmosphere, heavy and depressing with the traditions of ancient times. The woods were not like the timbered regions of Kentucky and the fir-covered expanses of the Northwest, but were redolent of mystery. Awful scenes had been enacted in their dark depths and fearful spectacles might be encountered beneath their towering tops.

More than one ranger believed he had glimpsed the Stonish Giants striding through the dusk of early evening on a cannibal quest, or had seen the Flying Heads with viperish hair and glowing eyes streaming across the openings to scatter disease and death. The giant serpent of Ontario still reared his head betimes only to be driven back by the Thunderers. The trader knew one ranger who solemnly swore he had stood on the shore of a moonlit lake and seen the skeletons of dead men swimming about.

The shadow of these horror tales kept pace with the trader as he stole down the silent aisles, working toward the head of Seneca Lake in a circuitous route to avoid the Indian village of Catherine Town at the foot of that body of water. The fears he had entertained at Michilimackinac were supplanted by a vague horror of the interminable reaches of the dismal woods. His abhorrence of the unknowable reached a pitch that almost inclined him to visit some Indian village and ask for an escort to the Mohawk.

Had he been within the realm of any nation but that of the Senecas he would have obeyed the impulse. Only the indomitable purpose which sent him from Michilimackinac held him to the oppressive loneliness of a secret journey. He could make better time alone. With the least delay he must find Sir William and shift the responsibility of his grim convictions to the shoulders of that astute Irishman.

As he neared the head of the lake a cold rain began seeping through the lofty forest crown, deepening the gloom and completing his discomfort. He had planned to round the lake in a wide detour to avoid the town of Canadasaga,—Ganadasege, the Senecas called it—but the storm sapped his patience and he believed he could cross unobserved if he were lucky enough to find a canoe. Once on the Mohawk trail he would seek Sir William at Fort Stanwix, and, failing, would push on to Johnson Hall, Dutch Schenectady or even Albany.

A canoe was soon found, and veiled by the dusk and the sullen downpour he set forth, chilled to the bone and wondering if dead men swam the waters on the full of the moon. Then through the mist ahead he made out an object approaching rapidly. Cursing his luck for meeting a Seneca afloat he turned back to the shore.

"Gowe!" cried the Indian in the canoe, the long drawn-out call having no significance except to arrest attention.

Besse knew he had been mistaken for a

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red man and redoubled his efforts to regain the bank.

"*Gowe!*" came the halloo down the shore on his left, and like an echo the cry was repeated up the shore.

As he sent his birch up the sand a tall figure, closely wrapped in blankets, stepped from the dripping bushes and confronted him.

As the two exchanged glances bronzed hands reached from the bushes on the trader's right and plucked away his rifle. Then the warrior in front of him allowed his blanket to drop to his waist, revealing the totem of the Wolf clan painted on his chest, and demanded——

"What does the white men do near Ganadasege?"

Without appearing to note the stealthy figures closing in about him Besse calmly replied—

"He is on his way to meet our great father, Sir William Johnson."

"He has lost his way if he looks for our *brother* here," said the Seneca.

The warrior's refusal to acknowledge Sir William as the "great father" impressed the trader disagreeably. No other tribe in the league would withhold the title. Besse feared that the Senecas, farthest removed from Johnson Hall and immediately susceptible to French influence, were gradually being weaned from their old allegiance, although not yet ready to disavow their loyalty to the great Irishman.

"No one is lost who meets his brothers," calmly replied the trader.

The Seneca's gaze remained imperturbable, neither lighting in friendship at the amiable speech, nor displaying any venom. For nearly a minute he maintained a steady scrutiny, then abruptly turned on his heel and proceeded along the deeply worn trail. Besse fell in at his heels, followed by the other warriors. In a sense he was a captive although no hand was laid upon him.

No word was spoken till the village was reached when the leader directed the trader to enter a small cabin. He did so and immediately was supplied with food and dry blankets, the warmth of the fireplace quickly drying out his forest dress. While he ate several warriors remained just outside the door as though standing guard.

He satisfied his appetite and lighted his pipe and waited. It was black night outside when the warrior of the Wolf clan entered and said——

"The white man will go to the council house."

Besse followed close behind his conductor with several braves falling in behind him. In single file the party crossed the frost-bitten harvest fields to the long council house, around the door of which were gathered the young bucks who had yet to earn the right to enter. When the member of the Wolf clan threw back the door the trader noted the long room was filled with warriors, evidencing matters of weight were to be disposed of. As he entered his heart sank, for among the elderly men seated on mats at the end of the room was the Killer.

For a minute he stared in astonishment at the Ojibway, the last person he had expected to see in the Iroquois country. The Killer must have taken the main trail to the village, while he, the trader, was skulking through remote sections of the forest.

Besse knew the Ojibway saw and recognized him the moment he entered, but not by so much as the turn of an eyelash did the Indian betray the fact.

His conductor whispered in his ear:

"As the agent of Sir William Johnson you will report to him what the council decides. A belt has been brought from the Western nations."

Then, indeed, did the trader lament the wet priming of his rifle when it covered the Killer's black breast. Instead of being bound for the Delawares with his belts he was making for the Six Nations.

THE door of the council room closed and all therein became silent. Each savage face was an inscrutable mask, only the glittering eyes betraying life. Pipes adorned with eagle feathers were lighted and passed through the several circles of the assembly. At the end of this ceremony the Killer rose and threw aside his blanket, naked except for his breech-clout, his long black hair falling between his shoulders. Slowly advancing to the center of the council he folded his arms and gazed about him.

The warriors stirred, their faces taking on life, their muscles twitching as they looked on the six feet of brawn and muscle of the Ojibway, whose fame was known throughout the League. Such as he could always command followers. Besse, even

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in his perturbation, could not help but contrast his splendid bearing and the affectation of ornament and dress of the young dandies outside.

The grim, stalwart figure was painted black from head to foot. A terrible machine for destruction. He breathed the fierce freedom of the Northwest, as yet barely contaminated by trader, soldier or settler. And the Senecas, redoubtable among all warriors, felt the appeal of his warlike presence and were eager for his words.

Speaking slowly at first, but soon rushed by his passions into a whirlwind of eloquence the Killer said:

"My brothers, who guard the Great Black Doorway of the Long House, I bring to you a talk from the Three Fires, and I speak for my father, the great Pontiac.

"My brothers of the Extended Lodge, I also speak for our great father, the French king. The French king is old and feeble and he has been asleep. While he slept the English stole Canada. Now he is wakening from his long sleep and sends belts to his red children on the Michigan and Huron, asking why we stood by and let the English steal Canada.

"My brothers of the Six Nations, you are the children of our great father. He asks why you sit on your mats while these things are so. He asks how long you will let the bad flesh remain in the land. If the allied tribes of the Northwest take up the hatchet against the English it is for your good. If the hatchet is taken up will you sit like squaws in your lodges, or will you fight for your own? The English must die, or the Indian must die.

"The time is near when the Seneca nation must be wholly French or wholly English. The French king covered the bodies of our dead with many gifts. The English king takes our land and gives us nothing. If you are French *take up that belt!*"

And with a dramatic gesture he hurled the black and purple war belt of Pontiac at their feet.

A sharp hissing sound ran through the assemblage, and hands twitched to snatch up the token which would bind the keepers of the Western Door to the policy of exterminating the English.

Before he realized it Besse was on his feet.

"Oh, Senecas, remember Champlain," were his first words.

And he could have uttered none more likely to arrest the attention of his hearers. For the Iroquois had never forgiven Champlain's campaign against them, when by the use of firearms—then unknown to them—he killed their chiefs and warriors and won a notable victory for his Canadian Indians.

The trader continued:

"There are wild Indians in the West who have tails like bears, and who have let fall the chain of friendship and now plan war against the English. Senecas, hold fast to the chain and close your ears to their words.

"Senecas, remember how the French king sent Champlain against the league to batter down the Eastern Door. Senecas, have you forgotten how the French king sent Frontenac and his soldiers against you? Listen not to the words of the Ojibway, whose people blocked your path to the west. His words are so many evil birds whistling in your ears. The white wampum hangs between you and the English.

"Your *brother*, Sir William Johnson, will make a talk for you to the English king, who is your great father. The English king sent you many presents, but bad men stole them. He will be very angry to learn this and will send more presents and punish the thieves. The French king is old and weak. The English king never sleeps. I give you this belt from Sir William Johnson to remind you of your duty." And from his waist he produced a string of white wampum such as most traders carried and tossed it upon the war-belt.

Beyond a slight tremor of his muscular frame there was nothing to indicate the Killer had heard the white man; nor did he appear to see the white belt. As the trader ceased speaking he quietly continued:

"Keepers of the Western Doorway, so long as French and English were at war the Indian was sought by both sides and given many presents. Now the French have lost Canada the English think to get along without us. Not only do they stop giving presents and supplying us with powder for our guns, but they say we are in the way and must be kicked one side. If the young men of the French king killed your braves the bodies have been covered.

"The English have trapped and killed your warriors, but their dead hands still stick out of the ground. The war-axes of the Iroquois have stuck in the heads of the

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Western nations in many places, but the Three Fires and their kinsmen have forgotten that. The French build forts only where we say they may. They marry our women and become our brothers. They make feasts for us. They give us presents and much brandy.

"The English give us hard words and rob us. Where they build a fort there springs up a settlement. They eat up the forests and spoil the hunting for all time. The Western nations will whip the English without the help of the Six Nations, but we want the Long House with us. Look on this! Will you pick it up?"

And from his side flashed a hatchet, painted red, which was thrown with such cunning as to sever the white belt and knock it from the black.

A dozen eager hands stretched out only to be stayed by the trader's hoarse voice warning:

"Touch it not, O Senecas. Starving men and dead men are under that red ax. Let it be. If you pick it up you beat a Western Door down to the ground. An evil hand knocks at your door; do not open it. There is much blood on that hatchet, but it is not all English blood."

The Killer beheld victory snatched from him a second time, and his rage mastered him and made his voice scarcely intelligible as he demanded—

"How long since a *fur-trader* can enter the councils of the Long House and tell the Seneca nation what it shall do and what it shall not do?"

This was adroit, as the unfortunate custom of the English to conduct Indian affairs through fur-traders was especially hateful to the Six Nations, by whom the term "fur-trader" was held in abhorrence.

Murmurs of resentment ran through the circles and fierce glances were darted at Besse. As he gathered himself to reply a young warrior, just across the threshold of exultation at having taken his first scalp, leaped forward and spurning the pieces of the white wampum aside snatched up the war-belt, and cried:

"By my hand the Seneca nation picks up the black belt of Pontiac! By my hand the keepers of the Black Doorway pick up the red hatchet! This is the Senecas' answer to the *fur-trader*. Who will drive the ax into the war-post beneath the red hatchet?"

And he passed to the door, waving belt and ax above his head, with the younger members of the council crowding after him, yelling loudly and joyously.

The Killer stood with folded arms and bowed head, striving to smother any show of triumph. The elders of the council, while in sympathy with his plea and doubtless intending to pick up the belt ultimately, were disgruntled that the novice should force their hand. That rôle were better fitted for an older and more astute man. This chagrin was reflected in the frowning visage of Besse's conductor, who now pushed him to the door, saying:

"For a little while the trail will be open to the Englishman. After that he must trust to the white man's *orenda*. He will find his rifle and some corn in the cabin where he ate. Go!"

The bright blaze of a new fire defied the rain. Through the mist the dancing warriors became so many grotesque demons as they circled the war post, hacking it with their axes and ripping off scalps in pantomime. The immense popularity of this demonstration permitted the trader to go unnoticed.

"Curse the spitfire who picked up the belt," he groaned as he tripped over squash vines at the edge of the forest. "Well, the fat's in the fire an' many a cabin will blaze afore old Amherst gits 'round to realize he's got a fight on his hands."

HE HAD traveled all night and the greater part of the day before daring to sleep. When he awoke on his couch of black mold the sense of sight was useless, but his other senses warned him of a hostile presence. He softly pulled the ax from its loop, his ear to the ground registering a faint noise close at hand. He fancied he could detect the sound of suppressed breathing. Lightly brushing his fingers over the litter of dead twigs he selected a stout stick and flipped it from him, at the same time squirming from his blanket. The stick struck a tree and something near his head sprang after it. Then silence.

This slight confusion, although limited to seconds, allowed him to gain his feet and slip behind a massive pine. Whoever was dogging him had interpreted the falling stick as an incautious movement made by him. Now the prowler knew he had been

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tricked into betraying his position and would redouble his cunning to regain the advantage. Besse was not surprised at being followed from Çanadasaga, as he had looked for pursuit; but it was disconcerting to find the menace at his very elbow. Had he slept on for another sixty seconds he would have been discovered and killed, or captured and held for torture.

The duel must be fought by touch and hearing. Did revenge, or lust for glory actuate his trailer? On the answer to this question depended the trader's mode of procedure for the next few minutes. If revenge be the motive, then there was but one who would track him with such pertinacity: if love of glory, then his task was simpler, as the foe must be some young brave hungry for his first scalp and inferior to the trader in cunning.

Revenge or glory? One of these incentives was behind every war-path, every stealthy killing. Preliminary to falling back to another tree Besse stretched out his hand, and the tips of his fingers touched a naked arm.

He dropped to his heels as a startled yell broke the silence and a lithe body hurled itself upon him.

"A young brave," the trader contentedly told himself as he raised his knees and arms and threw his assailant over his head.

But as quick as a catamount the savage twisted back and caught the trader by the hair, all the time yelling loudly. Besse instantly lunged forward to get inside the knife thrust and struck with his ax. With a sickening crunch the blade landed on bone. Waiting a moment to make sure his opponent was dead the trader jumped to his feet and leaned against a tree, trying to determine the location of his blanket.

Something *swished* from the blackness and bored his right side with fire. He yelped aloud more in astonishment than in pain. A long hunting-knife had scraped his ribs and was pinning the loose flesh to the tree. He pulled it loose with his left hand and shifted his position. He had had no idea there was more than one foe. He had counted coup on the glory-seeker but this other killer. . . .

He bared his teeth in a snarl. That was it! The Killer! And grewsome stories of the Ojibway's ferocity and cunning flashed through his mind. A soft rustling at his right almost caused him to betray himself. He smiled grimly. The Killer had tossed a twig, hoping to flush him. Through half-closed lids he glared into the blackness from whence he believed the twig was thrown. The silence was unnerving. The entire forest seemed to be holding its breath. The outcry of the first assailant had carried far, and the trader knew a cloud of warriors was closing in.

Within a dozen feet of him was his opponent, who could afford to play a waiting game. Besse knew he must break from the spot at once and he shifted the heavy knife to his right hand, holding it by the point, his ears primed to catch the slightest clue. At last it came, so soft and faint that only the woods bred could detect it. With a powerful snap of his forearm the trader hurled the knife. A yell, a convulsive leap, and the savage tripped over the dead warrior, but in falling his clawing hands happened to clutch the trader's legs.

Besse dropped with a thud as his legs were yanked from under him. He struck with the ax and cut the air. Then his man was upon him, screeching and fighting like a demon. The trader grasped his top-knot and forced his head back. As they rolled from the tree, striking at random, lights flashed nearby and hoarse voices called out. With a supreme effort and largely by luck the trader gave the *coup de grace* just as the Senecas fell upon him.

THEY dragged him to an opening where they trimmed the branches from a small spruce and tied him to it. At one side they placed the bodies of the brave, who had picked up the belt of Pontiac, and the Killer. The hunting-knife still stuck in the Killer's left shoulder. In a semi-circle before the trader grouped the Senecas, a score or more. The warrior of the Wolf clan, who had permitted him to escape but later on the plea of the Killer, had been overruled in the council, now stepped forward and said:

"Fur-trader, you have killed one of our young men. It would take many presents to cover him, but the Seneca nation would accept them. You have killed the mighty chief of the Ojibway. The Seneca nation does not avenge the death of an Ojibway. But you should have waited till he had finished his business at the Western Door. He knocked and the door was opened to him. He was received as a belt-bearer from

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the Three Fires. The Seneca nation became responsible for his safe return to his people. Because you killed this messenger you must die."

Knowing a display of weakness would only add to his torture Besse met the stern gaze unflinchingly, and proudly replied:

"The little brother of Sir William Johnson spoke with a straight tongue when in your council he warned that dead men lay under the red ax and the black belt, and that the blood on the ax was not all English blood. I see Seneca and Ojibway blood. Keepers of the Western Door, which is the better man, the fur-trader you despised, or the mighty Killer who tried to slay him while he slept? I do not count the Seneca, who was but a child in such work."

The slighting reference to the dead Seneca sent a tremor of rage through the group, yet recognition of bravery was never withheld by the Iroquois. It was acknowledged in captives as readily as in their own warriors. The warrior of the Wolf clan raised his ax high, his eyes blazing with tribute. Whereat every ax behind him was similarly elevated in a salute to a brave man.

"Now that the Senecas find me a man, and not a woman," continued Besse, "they can go ahead and roast me,——— you!"

The war-axes were lowered and raised again in homage to his dauntless bearing, but even while they were held aloft the second time an expression of surprise flickered from face to face, for sounds that were not of the night were rising in the forest near them. Blankets were thrown over the dead, the torches were extinguished and several warriors slipped away to investigate.

The warrior of the Wolf clan placed his fingers on Besse's lips, prepared to still his voice did he attempt to call out. Then lights sprang up all around the opening, the Seneca scouts came back yelping sharply; and as one in a dream the trader beheld a white man, backed by many stalwart braves, file in between him and his captors.

AT THIS time Sir William Johnson was forty-seven years old and in his prime. Adored by the Mohawks, who had made him a chief of that nation, his efforts alone had held them in check when outside influences and the imbecility of his superiors in office were pricking them on to raid the settlements. Scarcely less effective was his restraining power over the other tribes of the League, with the exception of the Senecas. As he listened to the Seneca's explanation of the scene, that a fur-trader had wantonly slain two of the tribe, his grave, manly face grew stern with indignation.

Wheeling on Besse, his tall, rugged figure drawn to its full height, he bitterly arraigned, speaking in English:

"It's the likes of you who stir up these Indians to deviltry. They say you must go to the torture, my man, and 'fore God I believe you deserve it. Do you think you can come here and kill two of their braves and then be saved by me and my Mohawks? By Heavens! With the fate of the provinces hanging in the balance you and your breed tip the scales against us! I could put you to the torture myself, almost. You'll whine self-defense. I say you have no business in this country.

"I'll do this—and only this. You have a white skin even if a —— poor one. You shall not be tortured. That is all I can grant, and I give that with poor grace, almost. I hear an emissary is coming to the Senecas from the Northwest. I hurry here on the desperate chance to hold the nation back—and I find you responsible for two deaths and the nation ripe for hellwork. I'm almost sorry I promised to save you from the torture."

His anger accumulated as he spoke, for he had worked night and day to avert the catastrophe of an Iroquois uprising. He was sure of his Mohawks and hopeful of the Oneidas, Tuscaroras, Onondagas and Cayugas. The Senecas constituted his stiffest problem. It would be touch and go with them.

He had been hindered and crossed at every step by blind Amherst, he had been irritated beyond endurance by the brutality of traders and the acts of irresponsible forest rangers. He had been compelled to dip into his own pocket for presents which the Government refused to make, or, having made, allowed to be stolen.

"I've come from Michilimackinac, Sir William, to find you," replied Besse. "There's —— to pay from the Strait to Virginia unless you can stop it. The Western forts are doomed. The commanders have lost their eyes. The Injuns plot beneath their very noses."

"Unless I can stop it!" fiercely repeated

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Sir William, smashing his fists together. "And with the likes of you pouring oil on the flames! And do you think you bring me news? I am here to work against the messenger from Pontiac, and your work has tied my hands. If the forts are blind let them be eaten up. It's the settlements I'm thinking of. But you, sirrah! Did you think to find a welcome at Johnson Hall when you would come with the blood of the Senecas on your hands? And I moving heaven and hell to hold them back from an alliance with the Northwest."

"The messenger from the Three Fires already has arrived," Besse quietly informed. "He brought a war-belt and a red ax. He threw them at the feet of the Senecas two nights ago. I was there and talked against him."

For a moment Sir William's lips remained parted in chagrin and apprehension. Then he hoarsely demanded—

"Did they pick them up?"

"The dead warrior on my left picked them up. The Western Door stands open to the tribes of the Northwest."

"My God! Too late! The messenger—has he departed with the answer?"

"He has departed, but not to the Three Fires. Pick away the blanket from that feller on my right. He brought the belt and the ax. The Killer, the mouthpiece to the Eastern tribes for Pontiac. He and the Seneca followed me to kill me. It was them or me."

Sir William was not listening. With one stride he snatched away the blankets and with one glance at the Killer's painted body and long loose hair he faced the warrior of the Wolf clan and in a voice of thunder cried:

"Woe to the Seneca nation when it leaves the Western Door of the Long House open for that bad flesh to enter! Woe to the Seneca nation when it lets fall from its hand the chain that has bound it to the English, and listens to the whistling of evil birds. Seneca, has your council sent an answer, or was this bad Indian to carry it back?" And he paused and waited anxiously for the answer.

The warrior of the Wolf clan was greatly disturbed.

"A belt is now on the way to the Three Fires. The Senecas are wholly French," he mumbled.

"Then take this talk from me to your people. Tell them Sir William Johnson says that if they choose to be French they shall lose this land and live where the French lived, in Canada." Then to his Mohawks, "Release that man."

The Senecas did not offer to interfere as the trader was set free. The warrior of the Wolf clan hung his head now that he stood at the parting of the ways with the man who had labored so incessantly for the good of the Seneca nation. And as Sir William and Besse passed down the line of Senecas, followed by the grim Mohawks, every Seneca ax was raised in salute.

HOW Sir William Johnson, after the bloody madness had run its course, made peace with the tribes of the Northwest at Oswego, giving them belts to dry their eyes, to cover their dead, to open their ears and clear their throats, is a matter of history. But history can not record the names of the thousands of men and women and children, who were killed or captured, between the opening of the Western Door and that Summer day at Oswego, when the great Irishman smoked the peace pipe with the great war-chief of the Ottawas.

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A MAN'S WOMAN

by

Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "With Pistol and Second Reader," "The Little Trapper of Nobody's Country," etc.

THE young superintendent of the Little Big Creek logging outfit sat at his scarred roll-top desk, which stood in a corner of his little office in the down-stairs of the camp's big and unpainted boarding-house. There were soft, quick footfalls behind him, and a youthful voice called his name. Townley wheeled half-way around in his desk chair.

"Hello, 'Buster'!" he exclaimed.

"Looky!" the boy said gleefully, holding out in both hands a Winchester almost as tall as himself. "She gi' me this here gun!"

"You're too small to have a rifle, Buster," frowned the superintendent.

The barefooted lad, an orphan and a logging-camp rat whom Townley had found starving and taken up, thumped the butt of the Winchester on the floor. A spirit of deep chagrin showed on his sunburned and freckled face, and the glow of pride died out of his eyes.

"I'm 'leven year old, Bent," he said, pleading, his voice musical in its hill drawl. "My daddy used to le' me shoot his rifle. Yeuh. He shore did."

Little McBride was really older than his years. Orphanhood always tends toward that. Benton Townley looked up.

"You say she gave it to you. Who is she?"

"Aw, don't you know, Bent? Kit, o' course."

"I see. But I'd say 'Miss Kit,' I believe," Townley muttered.

He had hardly been aware that his neighbor Kit Littleford existed. He had never cared for women; in fact, he was somewhat prejudiced against them, having known only a few. Life had been rather seamy for Townley. He had drifted a lot, finally serving an enlistment in the Army, from which he had returned to his native hills fairly educated and a good deal of a gentleman in his principles. However, he was still a man's man and a fighting man. His being superintendent of the Little Big Creek logging operations was ample proof of that. He had won the superintendency by fighting.

Kit Littleford's history was in itself a tragedy. Her father and mother, prince and princess of two proud hill clans, had married against the wills of their respective peoples, and each had been promptly cast out. Then Littleford and his young wife, as proud as any of the rest, had pioneered from the Pigeon River country to the wooded valley of Little Big Creek and settled there. Three years before the opening of this story, Littleford had died. Just two weeks before little McBride came into possession of the rifle, Kit's mother had followed her husband on the long dim trail.

"Does the girl intend to live on there alone?" asked Townley of the boy.

Buster McBride was very well informed concerning the matter. The girl was one of his best friends.

"Yeuh," he nodded. "She says nothin' much don't matter now; and she—Bent, she bellered when she told me that."

"Cried, you mean."

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In spite of his tendency to glance askance at femininity in general, Townley felt himself sympathizing. For that young woman to remain alone and practically friendless there in the wilds, with only chickens and a vegetable garden for her support—it was hardly to be thought of.

"Her daddy left two good rifles," said Buster, "and she's still got one for protection. The main trouble is, there's 'Bobcat' Hutton. He's a rotten bad aig, and he's crazy for her to marry him. I've done seed you don't like wimmen much, Bent. But Kit's dif'rent. She's what I'd call a man's woman. Yeuh."

The countenance of the superintendent showed real interest at the mention of Bobcat Hutton. The latter-named person was an eighth Cherokee Indian, shiftless, and unquestionably bad. At one time or another, he had cowed at a gun's point every man of the Little Big Creek neighborhood—with the one exception of Benton Townley, and these two had as yet not more than barely spoken to each other.

"He was there when I left," added Buster. "I hurried here, so's I could show ye this here gun o' mine, Bent. Hain't she a dandy—hain't she!"

Townley rose. He looked big and strong and dependable, in his laced boots and corduroy trousers, blue shirt and broad-rimmed hat.

"Go up-stairs and get your clothes, Buster," he ordered. "And hurry."

It was not a big bundle that little McBride brought down the rough stairway a few minutes later. Fear itself was in his eyes now, but he said nothing. Townley took the bundle from the boy's hands.

"Come with me," he said, "and bring along that rifle."

They crossed the clearing and the creek, entered the woodland, and followed a narrow and winding path for half a mile through the thick evergreen and now blooming laurels. Neither spoke a single word on the little journey. At the end of the path, they came upon a hewn-log house of three rooms; there was a front porch and a back porch, both laden with rioting honeysuckle, and on the front porch sat a home-made rocker lined with an untanned sheepskin.

At the weatherbeaten paling gate, the lad seized Townley's sleeve.

"Better be keerful," he whispered. "Bobcat's in there, Bent, and he might shoot. You can have my gun, but the' ain't no loads in it."

Townley gave his small companion the bundle and a grim smile. Then he opened the gate without a noise, hastened up the guttered and marigold-bordered path that led to the porch, halted on the stone step and listened. Soon he heard one little sound, and it sickened him. It was a woman's low, choking sob. He strode through the doorway and into the cabin's sitting-room, halted, rested his knotted hands on his hips, and stood glaring like an angry lion at that which he saw.

Before him, Kit Littleford sat slumped in a chair. Over her, his black eyes devilish, stood the dark-skinned and lanky villain who had been nicknamed for a wildcat. Hutton straightened, grinned the grin of a dangerous coward, then went ashen with resentment. The girl rose and stepped toward the newcomer; in a shaken voice of appeal she breathed simply—

"Mr. Townley!"

Townley, too, went ashen. He didn't like women, but he couldn't see them given brutal treatment.

"What," he demanded icily of Bobcat Hutton, "have you been doing to annoy this girl?"

Hutton glanced at a short Winchester that he had set beside the stone fireplace not long before. Townley stepped toward the rifle, and Hutton seemed disappointed. Suddenly Hutton produced a new marriage license.

"I axed her," he said, "to marry me. She needs somebody to pervide for her."

Townley flashed his stern, gray eyes to the drawn face of Kit Littleford.

"What did he say to you?" he asked; and he took still another step toward the short Winchester.

"He asked me to marry him," answered the girl.

"Did he try bullying you?"

"He said," Kit murmured, "that if I didn't marry him, my house would burn down one of these nights; and he said—perhaps—I might burn in it!"

THE Little Big Creek superintendent sprang forward, and one of his hands gripped Hutton's collar; he shook Hutton as a dog shakes a copperhead. Kit cried out frightenedly. With a word of

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apology to the girl, Townley flung the other man from him, stepped to the short Winchester and took possession of it.

"I'd be foolish to give you this gun now, Bobcat," he said to the boiling Hutton. "But come to camp tomorrow, and you may have it. There'll be something I'll want to tell you then, Bobcat."

Hutton picked up his slouch hat, gave Townley a glance of demoniacal hatred, and hurried away. When he had gone, Townley turned to Kit. It was the first time he had ever really seen her, though she had been under his eyes a score of times at the camp's commissary, and he was now surprised to note that she had poise, strength, and a beauty that would bear the wash.

Her hair and eyes were brown, and she wore her hair tastefully up on her head instead of down her back in a single plait; she had on a neatly-fitting percale dress, and shoes and stockings. There was about her a roundness of figure that suggested womanhood rather than girlhood, and she was a little taller than the average for her sex. He judged that she was twenty-two.

"It's hard for me to believe," he said, voicing his thoughts, "that you belong out here."

She understood perfectly.

"I was educated, more or less, at the Presbyterian mission on Caney River," she replied. "I—I thank you for what you did, but you'd better watch Bobcat! He'll try to get you from the laurels. It's his old game, and he boasts of it."

"Never mind Bobcat," Townley smiled. "I've been thinking—surely, you don't mean to stay on here alone!"

Kit straightened. The mountain-born independence shone from her eyes.

"Yes," she told him. "I can't go to either side of my people. They're as hard as flint, where I'm concerned. And I can't be anybody's hired help. There's nothing I can do except stay on here alone, Mr. Townley."

"Then I'm going to let you have my boy, Buster," said Townley. "He'll help you, and thereby pay for his keep, and he'll be remarkable company. I'm sure you'll like him; he's a good lad, Miss Littleford, and you'll find him true to the bone of him."

As if she didn't know he was a good lad! Kit Littleford smiled, and Townley began to wonder why he had never really seen her before. The great question of companionship to her seemed answered now. She sat down and held out both hands to the silent figure that had stood like a brown statue, with a rifle almost taller than himself, just inside the doorway from the moment Townley had entered the room.

"Would you like to live with me, Buster?"

The boy looked at Townley. His fears were confirmed; he knew now why his god had ordered him to bring his clothes. Deep reproach was in Buster's gaze. Townley nodded, slyly but meaningly, and half-closed one of the gray eyes that could be so stern when he willed—and Buster McBride moved obediently toward the beckoning hands.

"Yessum," he answered. "I'd shore like it all right. But—say, Bent, I can come to see you sometimes, cain't I? I like you a whole —— of a lot, Bent! And will you come out here to see me sometimes?"

Usually the man reproved the boy for the use of bad words; but now, although it had been done in the presence of a woman, he did not. He glanced toward Kit Littleford, and his eyes sparkled.

"Sure!" he said.

Then he strode off.

Late in the following morning, Bobcat Hutton walked into the camp office and asked for his rifle. Townley passed it over, ordered Hutton to get off the company's lands and stay off, and said it might be as much as his life was worth if he caught him snooping around the Littleford cabin again.

Bobcat Hutton dropped the butt of the Winchester to the floor between his toes. Part of his stock in trade was the ability to look a man straight in the eye, and he looked Benton Townley straight in the eye now.

He had the inherited cunning of a Cherokee Indian and the resourcefulness of one accustomed to living in a wilderness solely by his own wits, and he had had plenty of time in which to plan a somewhat devious but very nearly sure way to vengeance. Bobcat had not forgotten the shaking Townley had given him, nor had he forgotten being thwarted in his attempt to frighten Kit Littleford into marrying him as a means of survival.

"Look here, Mr. Townley," he began, still looking the Little Big Creek superintendent straight in the eye, "listen a minute. I was wrong. I been a low-down bad man all my life. I've thought it all over, and it

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don't pay. Ef God can fo'give a man, shorely you could. And Kit could. I didn't mean I'd burn her house, o' course! I want you to gi' me a job o' work. I'm not all bad, and I'll show you I ain't. And I'll promise 'at I never will pester Kit no more, too."

This was the very brand of talk to win over Benton Townley, and Bobcat knew it. He went on with it, pleading for an opportunity to redeem himself in the eyes of the people. Finally, Townley's face softened. He held out his hand. Hutton gripped it.

"You shall have the first job that's open, Bobcat," he promised.

"Thankee, Mr. Townley. I'll be around every day or so to see whuther ye need me or not."

"And you're not to annoy Miss Littleford. You understand?"

"Sartinly. I onderstand, Mr. Townley. Yes, sartinly."

With that he turned from the office, and the other watched him go. Townley was glad. He liked to see a man turn over a new, clean leaf in the book of his life. Townley went toward the commissary, which was nearby.

The morning logging train, a geared locomotive and a long string of empties, arrived just then from the lowland town that was the company's shipping-point. A brakeman leaped from the train as it came to a halt, and hastened up to the superintendent with the surly statement that he would work no more for the wages he was receiving. There was nothing of the coincidence in here. This man was secretly a crony of Hutton's, and Hutton had very neatly timed his arrival at the camp.

"Come back on pay-day and get your money," growled Townley. "Now get off the place before I give you a start with my boot."

It was rather rough, that talk. But it was able superintendency. As the former brakeman turned away, Townley caught sight of Bobcat Hutton, his rifle in the crook of his arm, ambling along beside the train.

"Bobcat!" he bellowed. "Here!"

Inwardly, Bobcat laughed in triumph. Outwardly, he was all expectancy. He hastened to the superintendent.

"You've got your job," said Townley. "Arnett has quit, and you may have his place braking. It's easy enough. They'll show you how."

"Thankee, Mr. Townley!" gushed Hutton.

And he laughed inwardly again.

DAYS passed, and Hutton had made a good brakeman. If Townley had had any suspicion concerning him, it would have been in a fair way to vanish now.

More days passed. The afternoon train, every car groaning under its weight of logs, had been started for the lowland. Townley, his hat and coat off, sat at his deak; he had finished making out his pay-roll envelopes for the day following, and now he was thinking of little McBride—the boy he had picked up, the boy who worshiped him, his boy. He had become attached to the lad, and now he missed him. As yet, Buster hadn't been back to the camp to see him, which puzzled him somewhat, since the distance was but half a mile. If he had time, he. . . .

It seemed almost magic. At that instant, Buster came bouncing like a rubber ball into the office, and his sunburned and freckled face was one big grin of gladness.

"Hello, Bent! Dang yer old hide! Yeuh, ye're lonesome! Goody! Umph-humph, had to send me off, did ye? Well, Bent, she's all to the mustard. She's shore all right. Makes me say my 'Now I Lay Me' jest like my own mammy used to do, and says I got to cut out my cussin', which I am. Listen, Bent: ef you'd marry her, both o' ye could ha' me at the same time; don't y' see?"

Townley smiled and finished it with a sniff. He drew the lad to his knee, slapped his hat off, seized his hair and tousled it with a lion's playfulness.

"You little rascal," he said, "I'm glad to see you."

"I'd ha' been here sooner," Buster explained, "but I was mad at you for givin' me away. But I ain't now. And 'en, I been a hoein' her gyarden; I've shore been a givin' them weeds—uh, I've been a cuttin' 'em down. Say, Bent, old hoss, I bet ye cain't never guess what she said about you!"

"No."

"Well," and it was true enough, "atter the racket atwixt you and Bobcat, and atter you was gone, she says this here: 'There goes the only one of 'em I've ever seed,' she says, a talkin' to herself like.

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" 'Only one o' which?' I says.

" 'Men like the men I've allus read about,' she says. 'She shore can read. Yeuh. Beats—uh, beats thunder how she can read. Fast as she can talk. And purty? Thuh good gracious! Bent, ye've got to know her to know how purty she is. Why'n't ye go to see her, Bent? Why'n't ye marry her? She shorely to God is a man's woman, Bent."

Townley didn't laugh. For a moment, there was no wind in his sails. That old child was a crimper. Townley could hardly have told you how he felt. A starved woman-soul perishing there in the wilderness—it drew pity from his heart, for he really understood. One of his big hands thrust its fingers through the boy's hair again and again, almost gently. The Summer silence became heavy.

"Poor little kid," he mumbled, and he spoke altogether to himself.

He might have meant Kit. He might have meant the boy on his knee. I don't know.

"Will ye come to see us tomorrow?" asked Buster.

"Tomorrow is monthly pay-day."

"Go wi' me now, then. Will ye, Bent?"

Townley laughed.

"If I was your daddy, son, maybe I'd spank you."

"That a-bein' the case," was the ready reply, "I'd be willin' to take it. It's —— for a boy like me not to have no daddy, Bent."

Little McBride received a chiding, and went back with his pockets full of commissary candy.

IT WAS a fashion of Townley's to go to Johnsville for the pay money himself. On the next day, he went down on the loaded morning train, and returned on the empty afternoon train, the latter-named arriving at the Little Big Creek camp around sundown. He rode in the dinky little passenger car that was attached to the rear of the train only when there was need of it, and he carried the twelve hundred dollars in a small black-leather satchel.

There were no other passengers, going or coming. Townley spent most of the time of the return journey in reading late newspapers.

The loggers had come in from their work in the woods, when he reached his office. These men and the trainmen gathered on the boarding-house porch, just outside the office door, to wait for him to fill the ready pay envelopes. Townley unlocked his desk and threw it open, put the satchel down before him, and dropped into his swivel chair. Then he opened the little satchel—and shot to his feet.

Every cent of the twelve hundred dollars was gone; and in place of it, to make weight, were four rusted iron bolts wrapped in a rag!

Townley was little less than thunderstruck. It didn't seem possible. The satchel had hardly been out of his hands since his leaving the bank; he was sure that nobody had been in the car with him on the return journey. But, mystifying as the matter was, Townley kept his wits about him. He judged that it were better to keep the robbery a secret for the present.

Then he stepped to the porch. The laughter and joking of the crew ceased as he faced them.

"Boys," he told them, and in this he spoke no untruth, "even banks sometimes make mistakes. I'll have to go to Johnsville again before I can pay off. I hope you don't mind."

Evidently nobody did. Townley noted quickly that not a man was missing, and a sudden little shred of suspicion caused him to make doubly sure that Bobcat Hutton was there. Hutton seemed as innocent of any knowledge of the theft as the other members of the crew.

When darkness had fallen thickly enough to hide his actions, the much perplexed superintendent stole alone across the hills and to a little store that boasted telephone connection with Johnsville. He soon had the county's high sheriff on the wire. Officer Barrier promised to be out early; he would ride to the store, loose his horse and let the animal go home of its own accord, walk on to the camp, and go back to Johnsville aboard a logging train.

It lacked but an hour of midnight when Townley reached Little Big Creek. He crept through his office and into his little bedroom, undressed and went to bed, all without making a light.

Sheriff Barrier, a lean man with long mustaches and a hard eye, arrived while the timberjacks were having their breakfast. After a whispered conference with Townley,

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the entire crew was lined up on the ground before the boarding-house porch. The sheriff believed himself to be a fair reader of countenances; he believed the guilty man, if he belonged to the logging outfit, would show some sign. But nobody did. Then Barrier announced the robbery, and made threats and promises, but still there was no sign.

At the close of the grilling, Bobcat Hutton stepped from the line of men. The hardest part of his villainous scheme was on.

"Sheriff," he said, looking Barrier straight in the eye, "I've allus had a bad repitation, which I am a tryin' to live down. People is a goin' to think, whuther they says anything or not. I want to ax you to s'arch me, my clo'es, my bunk up-stairs, everything I got."

"Mine also," said the good-hearted, democratic Benton Townley.

He was sorry for Bobcat. Besides, it would make the other men feel better toward him.

To Barrier, it seemed a forlorn hope. But he made the search. Townley's quarters and office came last, and—hidden away in a lower desk drawer, the officer found the missing twelve hundred dollars!

Barrier shoved the drawer shut and straightened, facing the dumfounded superintendent.

"I sure wouldn't have thought it!" he snapped at Townley. "But you were always pretty wild, Bent, and this is your climax. Put out your wrists, Bent."

It was all plain to Townley now, all but the mere method of the robbery. He pushed the jangling irons away.

"I see," roared Townley, "it was worth twelve hundred dollars to Bobcat, to get me out of the way and at the same time play even! No irons for me, Sheriff—get me? I'm not afraid of you, or your gun. I didn't do it; understand? If you'll listen, I'll tell you all about it. Will you listen?"

"It's not my place to listen. It's the place of the trial judge," frowned Barrier. "Put out your wrists, Bent."

Benton Townley had some good friends among the loggers, and a dozen of them were in the office now. They pressed toward the officer, and Barrier drew his revolver. If they went on, there would be bloodshed, and Townley knew it. He raised a hand to stop them. They had always obeyed him, and they obeyed him now.

"I'll go with him, boys," he said. "It's the best way. Keep the logs going, boys."

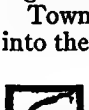
The manacles clicked over Townley's wrists. Barrier took charge of the pay money, and ordered a locomotive and the little passenger car made ready. The order was promptly put into effect, and Barrier and his now silent prisoner were soon on their way to Johnsville and its jail.

For the first slow mile, Benton sat like an image, though his mind was far from inactive. A Townley in jail? Impossible! He had come of a proud old line of hillfolk, not one of whom had ever been in a jail. A Townley must not go to jail—innocent or guilty, it hardly mattered here—a Townley must not go to jail! There was another and more practical side to it: imprisoned he would be powerless to clear himself of the unspeakable stigma of theft, while free he would have a fighting chance. And that was the only chance he would have asked for.

The two men sat in the same narrow seat, with Townley by the open window. The prisoner saw now that they were picking up speed rapidly along a straight and even stretch of track. Ahead of them, he knew, the rails ran over a log bridge that had been built across a wide pool at the confluence of Little Big Creek and Big Big Creek. Just below this bridge, the mountain river plunged into a series of roaring, dashing rapids.

When the desperate opportunity came, Townley quickly and confidently shoved Barrier face foremost into the aisle, scrambled through the car window and dropped! Barrier picked himself up, darted to the window and saw nothing of his man, then rushed toward the locomotive. The engineer couldn't hear his shouting for the thundering of the exhaust. Barrier clambered over the fuel car. When the short train at last came to a halt, the sheriff was a good two hundred years from the bridge.

Townley, of course, had meant to drop into the pool. But he hadn't fallen clear!



THOUGH it was in Summer, the evening following that same day set in with a chill, which was due to some distant thunderstorm. Buster McBride picked up two armfuls of brushwood, and made a crackling fire in the stone fireplace of the Littleford cabin's sitting-room. The lad's face was uncommonly thoughtful, uncommonly shrewd.

The truth of the matter was that he had

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been laying a great plan, a plan by which he hoped to have both Kit Littleford and Bent Townley at the same time and for all time. Kit had been a wonderful mother to him, but it was —— not to have a daddy. The scheme involved more or less falsehood, and he disliked that part of it; but when the devil drives, needs must!

So reasoned Buster.

Having finished caring for their supper dishes, Kit came in from the dining-room—which was one with the kitchen. The boy drew up a home-made rocker for her, and she gave him a grateful smile. Little McBride sat on the floor at her feet, and let his head rest against her knee.

"You know when I was at camp yeste'-day," he began, being now well steeled for the ordeal ahead of him.

"Yes, honey."

"I bet ye cain't guess what Bent said about you."

"No, Buster. What was it."

In spite of her, there was a slight note of eagerness in her voice. The lad recognized it, and it was warmth to the cockles of his heart. Glibly he told her this:

"Bent says this here: 'Buster, how's Kit? I declare, son, I ain't hardly slept none sence I seed her.'

" 'Why, Bent,' I says, 'you don't love Kit, do ye?'

" 'It looks like I do, son,' he says. 'I ain't never been strong on wimmen,' he says, 'and it's funny how suddent it was when it hit me. But don't tell her nothin' I've said, Buster,' he says.

" 'Why? Why mustn't I tell her?' I says. 'And why'n't ye come to see her, ef ye like her so much?'

"Bent shakes his head blue-like. 'She wouldn't never have me,' he says. 'I'm too ugly and too rough. She wouldn't have me,' he says."

Buster was almost out of breath when he stopped talking, and he was a little surprised at himself, too. For several minutes, Kit sat as silent as the boy at her knee. One of her hands went out and caressed Buster's hair slowly, gently. Finally he heard her say, in low tones not meant for the ears of anybody on earth—

"He isn't ugly, and he isn't rough enough to hurt him."

Buster screwed himself around on the floor. Before he could speak, there came a halloo from the front.

"Come in!" the lad called, after the old custom of hillfolk. He went to his feet, and so did Kit.

A timberjack who had been a good friend of Benton Townley's opened the front door and walked into the room. His was a long face. He didn't seem to see the girl, so intently was his gaze on the boy.

"Tell it!" exploded little McBride.

"Son," began the logger, "Bent was arrested this mornin', accused o' stealin' the pay money. He thought Bobcat Hutton had somethin' to do with it. As he was took toward Johnsville, he jumped out of a car window, and was—was killed. I thought you ought to know about it."

He finished unsteadily, turned and retraced his steps, soon disappearing in the darkness. Kit and the boy, dumb from the shock, looked at each other with widened eyes. Then Kit sat down in her chair, and took the stricken boy in her arms and into her lap. The boy sobbed. The young woman tried to comfort him, and her voice broke.

Half an hour later, Buster rose to throw fresh wood on the low-burned fire; as he did so, the floor of the back porch creaked. Little McBride snatched up the rifle Kit had given him, which was now loaded; he stepped to the back door and threw it wide open. Benton Townley being no longer their common protector, he expected to see Bobcat Hutton—and he meant to shoot him.

But the streaming firelight showed him a face that was by no means the face of Bobcat. It was that of Benton Townley! And it was bloody.

"Bent!" cried Buster. "Well, by—*gud!*"

Townley came staggering into the room, and Kit ran to assist him. She saw that his wrists were manacled, and that he wore around his temples a bandanna that was dyed a dark red on one side. With Buster's willing aid, she helped him to a home-made rocker. When they had drawn the cheap window shades and fastened all outside doors, he told them, in a barely audible voice, of all that had taken place.

"I fell on the stone base of one of the bridge-piers," he said, "and my head struck first. When I came to, I was in the current of the river, near the break of the rapids. I almost lost the fight with the swift current, but I did get out, and I hid myself in the laurels. Barrier didn't look for me very

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much. He saw blood on the pier-base, and he must have thought a man with his hands manacled, and hurt besides, had no chance at all with the river there."

He paused to breathe, then went on:

"Maybe it wasn't the right thing—for me to come here. But I didn't know where else to go. I can't be arrested. I've got to prove—that I'm innocent. Bobcat did it. I'll be able to go tomorrow, maybe."

"You may stay here as long as it seems necessary," declared Kit Littleford.

Then Townley, who for so long had glanced askance at womankind in general, reached for her hand, got it, dragged it weakly to his lips—kissed it.

"Thank you," he mumbled.

His face was deathly white now. He mumbled on:

"Buster, an ax and a hammer—these irons. I lose consciousness every little while, Miss Littleford; I'm going now—going, but don't be scared. It'll soon wear off——"

He slumped limply downward in the chair, and his head lurched forward.

When he came to, he was in bed, and his boots were off. His manacles were gone, and a clean white bandage was on his head. Standing over him, their faces seeming drawn in the yellow lamplight, were Buster and the young woman.

"Don't feel uneasy. I'll be all right," he tried to assure them.

"Buster shot a squirrel this afternoon, and I've got some broth making," smiled Kit—a rather wan smile. "Could you drink some?"

Townley nodded. Shortly afterward he took some of the broth, and it seemed to strengthen him. But soon afterward, all became black to him once more. Though he hardly realized it, the attacks of unconsciousness were rapidly becoming longer and closer together. A fractured bone was pressing upon his brain.

BENTON TOWNLEY did not again come clearly to himself until the afternoon of the following day. The slanting sunlight poured through a nearby window and fell upon one of those emergency sets of surgical instruments commonly found in the kits of country practitioners, which lay on a small table, and the sickening odor of ether was in his nostrils.

Then he saw a little old gray man sitting beside him, with his chin in his hands, intently watching him. Behind this stranger stood Kit and the boy, their weary eyes eagerly upon him. He noted in that first glance at the girl that her clothing was torn slightly in a dozen places, as from a spirited struggle, or thorns.

"The compression is gone, and you'll soon be all right," said the little old man. "But you must lie very still just now, and you mustn't talk."

Townley looked inquiringly toward Kit.

"The doctor won't tell anything you don't want told," she smiled. "I know him well. He's from the mission."

Came another afternoon. The Caney River physician had left strict orders and gone back. Townley beckoned the girl to his bedside, and began to disobey those strict orders.

"How'd you get that sawbones here?" he wanted to know.

"Never mind," she told him. "You're to lie very still, Mr. Townley."

He stared queerly at her, and she blushed a little. He began to think backward. There was no trail to the mission, and Buster could hardly have found the way in the night over ten miles of unbroken mountain wilderness. Then he remembered seeing her torn clothing, and he knew she had gone for the doctor herself, and alone! It was then that Benton Townley's opinion of womankind began to make its great and final change. Suddenly his eyes began to smart, and he closed them.

"You might have sent one of my friends from the camp," he mumbled.

"You mustn't talk," she protested. "I didn't know who to trust, you see."

"Where's Buster?" Evidently it was useless to try to keep him quiet.

"Hunting squirrels, for you," she said. "He's been gone two hours."

Townley lay silent for a quarter of an hour. Then he looked toward the girl again.

"Miss Littleford," he began, "I'd thank you for what you've done for me, if—if I knew how. I——"

"*Ssshl*" Kit interrupted; and she was now strangely white. "Listen," she went on, whispering, "no matter what happens, you mustn't move. Remember!"

With that she slipped from the room and closed the door behind her. Townley was not long to be kept in wonderment. He

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heard a heavy step on the porch, and he heard the voice of a man as he strode into the next room; it was a drunken voice, and full of a reckless abandon.

"H'lo, Kit! I'm back ag'in, y' see. Go with me to a preacher, Kit, and le's change ye name to Hutton. Missis Hutton. We'd shore git along. It ain't proper for you to stay here by yeself thisaway——"

"Don't, Bobcat," Kit murmured.

She didn't know what to do.

Hutton had gripped her arm. She thought of the man in the next room, and she didn't try to free herself from that contaminating touch; the doctor had said that Townley must not get up! To save Townley, who had been her protector, and who, according to Buster, had said that he hadn't been able to sleep for thinking of her—that was the thing she must do, regardless of the cost! The bitterest cross of Kit Littleford's life was to let that reeking, drunken, poisoned villain kiss her brow with his unspeakable lips—otherwise he would have made rough-house, and that would have brought Townley from his bed.

"Some gyurl, eh?" Hutton laughed, crazily. "Kiss me, Kit!"

Thus did a man speak his own damnation. The door to the other room moved open, and in the doorway, reeling slightly because of his dizziness, stood Benton Townley with Kit's Winchester in his hands.

"You snake—" Townley's voice was weak, but scathing—"take your hands off that woman, you snake!"

The rifle was wabbling on a level, and it was cocked. Hutton's leering countenance showed little surprise, and no fear whatever. He shoved Kit from him, went to his hip-pocket and came back instantly with a blued revolver. Townley pulled the trigger, and the weapon snapped! There hadn't been time to examine it. Kit sprang between the two men, and straight in line with the insane man's revolver; she thought only of saving Townley, who had saved her. At that instant a rifle cracked from somewhere outside, and a spray of powder-smoke suddenly appeared in the room—and Bobcat crumpled like a wet rag!

For the space of two seconds, Kit and Townley stared at each other, speechless. Then a barefoot boy came bouncing like a rubber ball through the outer doorway.

"Buster!" cried Kit.

"Buster's kerrect!" jubilated the lad. "Too small to have a rifle, am I, Bent, old hoss? I'd been a follerin' him ever since I started out, Kit, mighty nigh. I knowed he was bound for here, and I seed he was drunk. I jest waited ontel the time was right, and 'en I let him have it. Bent—look out, Bent, ye're a goin' to fall! ——, Kit, this won't do!"

They led Townley back to his bed. A sound from Hutton caused them to look around. A piteous light—the death-light—was on his now sober face, and it went to the woman's heart. She ran to him, knelt beside him, and he struggled up to an elbow.

"I'm sorry for you, Bobcat," she murmured, placing a steadying hand on his shoulder. "Is there anything I can do, Bobcat?"

Hutton had always been able to look people in the eye, and he looked Kit Littleford in the eye now. A great change came over his countenance. The little good that was in him had flared to the surface. One of Kit's hands smoothed his hair back tenderly, forgivingly, and as though in reward for this he spoke.

"Witnesses," he gurgled, "I'll save Townley—witnesses!"

Kit turned toward little McBride.

"Run to the camp for witnesses, Buster!" she said. "He wants to make a confession—hurry!"

Buster ran, and Buster returned running, and with him were the camp's cook and the commissary clerk. Hutton spoke brokenly, but they got his message. It was all simple enough. During a time when the train was slowly rounding a sharp curve on a steep grade, when the passenger car was not in sight from the engine and when Townley's newspaper was for a second between his eyes and everything else, Hutton had run along on the ground and frisked the money through a window, leaving a counterfeit pay satchel where the other had been.

He had thrown the money satchel into a thicket; then he had caught the train, being at his place on the cars when the rear end of the train again came into sight from the engine. While Townley was gone to telephone to the sheriff that night, Hutton had gone back and found the money; he had entered the office by means of an unfastened window, taken out a panel at the rear of the

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desk, hidden the money in a drawer and replaced the panel.

Hutton died just as he finished telling about it. The clerk and the cook carried away all that was left of him. In the cabin, a silent hour went by. Kit sat beside Townley, who was worse for his getting up, but not dangerously so; beside Kit, holding one bare foot idly up behind him and holding to a post of Kit's chair with the other hand, stood the happy and grinning little McBride, a boy who had paid his way. Buster broke the silence.

"Kit," he said, "ef Bent was to ax ye to marry him, would ye do it?"

The eyes of the grown-ups met, and the cheeks of the girl went a vivid pink.

"I was just thinking that same thing, Kit," smiled Townley. He went on, his voice hopeful but a little weak: "It's pretty early maybe; but I've always done things quick, the bigger the quicker—and this is the biggest thing I've ever tackled. We'd legally adopt the boy, of course. Will you, Kit?"

Kit leaned farther and farther toward him. Little McBride was entirely satisfied with her answer to Townley. It was given to Buster to feel somehow that he was not wholly necessary to the welfare of his god and goddess at that particular moment in their lives, and he went softly out to the porch and sat down on the stone step.

"Buster Townley," he muttered to himself, his eyes on the happy future. "Kit Townley. It sounds dang good to me. Mother; father—pap, daddy, dad. Dad; that's it. Well, she shorely to God is a man's woman now! Yeuh!"

GEN. PHIL. SHERIDAN'S PROPHECY

by **E. A. BRININSTOOL**

IN THE year 1875, the Texas Legislature, in session at Austin, were about to pass a bill for the protection of the buffalo, which the hide-hunters were rapidly exterminating. Gen. Phil. Sheridan, then in command of the Military Department of the Southwest, heard of the proposed bill, and went to Austin, and appearing before the joint assembly of the House and Senate, told them they were making a big mistake by legislating in the interest of the buffalo. He told them that instead of stopping the hide-hunters, they ought to give them a vote of thanks and a medal of bronze with a dead buffalo on one side and a discouraged Indian on the other.

Said General Sheridan:

"The hide-hunters have done in the last two years—and will do more in the next year—to settle the Indian question than the entire regular Army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indians' commissary, and it is a well-known fact that an army losing its base of supplies is placed at a great disadvantage. Send them powder and lead if you will, but for the sake of a lasting peace, let them kill, skin and sell until the buffalo is exterminated. Then your prairies can be covered with cattle and the festive cowboy, who follows the buffalo-hunter as the second forerunner of an advanced civilization."

His words had the desired effect, and for the next few years the American bison traveled through a hail of lead, until the last of these noble animals was wiped out. It was the greatest slaughter of the noblest game animal which ever graced any continent of the earth.

But it settled the Indian question effectually. The Indian was starved out and was obliged to come in on the reservations which the Government had furnished.

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A SAGA of MEN

A Complete Novelette

by

Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Author of "Penitentiary Post," "Before Marquette," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE MEN

"THOSE nitchies are getting ready to quit," said Tom Gill as, with a quick twist of his head, he released the pack-strap and dropped his burden at Marshall Wells' feet.

"Quit!" cried Marshall, who was puffing from his exertions over the mile and a quarter portage.

He looked at Gill speculatively.

"What makes you think so?" he asked at last.

"They were holding a powwow when I left the other end. I know some of their lingo and I know a little something about the way an Indian acts. Wait until they make the next trip and see."

Marshall looked at the heap of supplies and the two large canoes which had been brought across. The food and equipment would weigh fifteen hundred pounds easily, he knew, and each canoe a little more than one hundred.

He was facing the lake, looking north. Behind him lay a thousand miles of excessive exertion. His feet were on the crest of the height of land between those waters flowing north and east into Hudson's Bay and those flowing west and north into the Arctic Ocean. The night before he had camped on the sixtieth parallel.

Beyond the sixty-fourth, perhaps beyond the sixty-fifth, down a swift, tumbling, rock-maddened river, through a treeless, hopeless, lifeless waste, across huge lakes still bound by the last Winter's ice, lay the object of his search. Somewhere up there was Jimmie Dunn, waiting, hoping.

Even as Marshall looked snow beat against his face, a face swollen and bleeding from the attacks of mosquitoes and "bulldogs" the night before. Whether it was the last snow of Spring or the first of Autumn, he did not know.

The thought recalled the date, July fifteenth, and the date, in turn, served to bring a savage determination in the face of what the possible desertion of the Indians would mean. It was on the fifteenth of July ten years before that he and Jimmie Dunn had first faced death together in the waste places. The apparent certainty of their fate, the means of their escape, had made that date a symbol, a magic word and a magic number which always recalled the things of which they as men could not speak.

Marshall wondered if Jimmie were thinking of the date, if he were still confident that help was coming. That Jimmie might be dead he would not admit. Jimmie Dunn must be alive, even after an absence of two years in the barren grounds. Anything else was unthinkable, despite all that reason and experience proclaimed.

"As near as I can figure out," Tom broke in upon his thoughts, "these Indians never go farther than this lake. A long time ago

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some did, but nowadays they're scared of the country."

"It's the Eskimos they are afraid of," said Marshall, "and we're still two hundred miles from the southern limits of their territory. It's a hundred years or more since an Indian has seen an Eskimo, or an Eskimo an Indian, in this part of the country, but the old fear still holds."

"I thought the beggars were just looking for an excuse," growled Tom.

"Well, if they're going to quit they'll quit," said Marshall quietly. "You can't argue with a Chippewayan under any circumstances, or with any Indian when he's scared or obstinate. If I'd addressed that letter to the manager of the post instead of Larry personally we would have had some good men from Nipigon who would have stuck through. Now——"

Marshall turned again and looked north across the great lake. The snow hid everything, but his knowledge of the barren grounds, of its vicious rivers, its ceaseless gales, its numberless insects, its limitless extent, permitted him to see on and on for hundreds of miles, to picture great lakes, mountainous portages, snarling rapids, and always cold and hunger and despair.

Tom Gill knew, too, what lay before them, what the desertion of the Indians would mean.

"How many men did the Tyrrells have when they went through here to Chesterfield Inlet?" he asked.

"Six, Iroquois and Western half-breeds, besides the two of them, and three canoes."

Tom was about to speak again when three Indians came out of the brush and deposited their burdens on the shore. The white men looked at them indifferently and then began to load the canoes for departure. The Indians sat down on a rock and watched.

"Get busy," commanded Tom in English, but indicating unmistakably what he wanted them to do.

The Indians only stared for a moment. Then one of them began to speak. Marshall understood enough of their language to catch the drift of what he was saying. He had hoped, despite his faith in what Tom had reported, had hoped because he feared so greatly the consequences of desertion, and now, faced with the certainty of the firm intention of the three not to go farther, he was for a moment driven to frenzy.

It was no ordinary exploring expedition upon which he and Tom Gill were engaged. Somewhere to the north of them, out on the barren grounds, in that huge blank space which Back and the Tyrrells had only skirted, Jimmie Dunn had disappeared. Somewhere up there he was waiting for the help they would bring. Marshall would not consider the possibility of his being dead. Jimmie Dunn was not the sort that succumbs even to the terrors of the barren grounds. He had survived too much, had too often shown his ability to rise to any emergency.

For ten years Marshall Wells and Jimmie Dunn had been stabbing into the centers of pink blanks on the map of the northern end of the continent. They had crossed the barren grounds in Winter and in Summer. They had starved and slaved and frozen together. In that time they had discovered some things of scientific interest, had converted dotted lines on the map into huge, ice-bound lakes and great, crashing rivers.

They had passed with full stomachs the spot where members of Sir John Franklin's land expedition had starved nearly a hundred years before, and they had crawled on hands and knees, too weak even to kill a mother duck that flapped in their faces, when their canoe had been smashed on the shore of Great Slave Lake and they were only a few miles from the greatest trade route of the North.

Men can not do such things without building up a bond few of us can comprehend. In brief visits to their homes in the States friends had seen evidences of this bond. Because these friends never had the opportunity to learn what comradeship might mean, because their lives were devoted to getting, not giving, because they did not know the test of cutting the last six-inch strip of musk-ox intestine into two equal parts, because their generosity was always of the surplus, never of the ultimate possession, they had smiled and nudged each other's ribs.

Marshall Wells and Jimmie Dunn had passed through these brief contacts with their friends wholly unconscious of facetious remarks or such complete misunderstanding of the rarest thing in the world, a man's love for a man. They themselves never realized it perhaps. At least they never gave it conscious thought until the return from their last expedition together.

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Then, in what had been intended as a brief stay in civilization, Marshall Wells had been swept from the firm foundation of years of habit, ambition and concentrated energy. It was not that Jimmie had fallen in love with the same girl. In the first stunning knowledge of what had happened, in Marshall's halting confession, he had been only jealous, so jealous that, without a word, he had packed up and gone alone on the expedition they had planned together.

In his new happiness, and in his complete knowledge of Jimmie's character, Marshall had not found anything in this action to cause sorrow. He knew that upon Jimmie's return their old relations would be resumed, that the first quick anger of his friend, so characteristic of him outside the wilderness, would have been forgotten.

Only Jimmie Dunn did not return. After a year and a half Marshall began to worry. He sent out inquiries, messages which required nine months for an answer. The news came back after Jimmie had been gone more than two years, came on the day Marshall's son was born. There had been no word of him on Great Slave Lake since his departure in the Spring eighteen months before.

He had left word that he would return to Fort Resolution in the Fall, mid-Winter at the latest, but the Winter, Spring, Summer and another Fall had passed and there had been no word. He had sought to trace the Tehlon, or The-lew, to its source in the center of another blank space on the map, and the Hudson's Bay Company manager at Resolution did not hesitate to add Jimmie's name to the long list of those who had been lured and snared by the North.

Marshall would not believe this. He could not, not only because he hoped but because he knew Jimmie so well. Apparently reckless in their wild dashes, in reality his forethought was uncanny and his caution of the sort that is based not upon fear but upon an accurate knowledge of his own ability and of that with which he must contend.

Accordingly, when the boy and his mother had shown every promise of abounding health, Marshall started northward. There was little time for preparation, no time to send messages ahead and arrange preliminaries. With only a clear idea of what he must do, and with Tom Gill, he had started.

Tom, one of those rare types, a real Canadian bushman, had guided Marshall on his first moose-hunt in Ontario fourteen years before. Except on two of his trips with Jimmie Dunn, Marshall had never gone into the wilderness again without Tom. The man seemed to be capable of meeting any situation. No one ever handled a canoe in white water with finer judgment or could more accurately estimate the best way through an unknown rapid.

Tom was one of those white men who, playing the Indian's game, has surpassed the red man in every particular. He was by far a better hunter and trapper, could make a superior canoe, and he could sew better moccasins than a squaw and make real leather of a caribou skin.

He had gone with Marshall on their many expeditions, not because he cared for the hardships of the far North, but because of a real affection for the young man from the States.

"Most bushmen are made," he had said, "but the Wells lad was born one, even if that moose-hunt was his first trip. I'd start anywhere with him, and I'd have to keep humping to hold up my end."

AS MARSHALL and Tom faced the three mutineers on the shore of the lake each realized perfectly what their desertion would mean. To transport enough food the Indians were necessary. To get the two canoes down the Telzoa their labor was imperative. To make the journey rapidly and yet safely, to be able to return before Winter shut down over the barren grounds, there was no hope without them.

Marshall and Tom had gone over the situation too often to require further discussion now. They had met so many situations together, had acted in unison in so many emergencies, they did not always have to speak.

Both knew that arguments or inducements were worthless. Yet, because of their faith that Jimmie Dunn still lived, because they knew he must be found in the brief Summer now half gone, they pleaded and threatened, cajoled and derided, plumbed their knowledge of Indian character in a last desperate effort to induce the men to go farther.

The Indians remained as stubborn as only an Indian can be and at last the white men's desperation turned to swift anger when the Chippewayans demanded one of the canoes and part of the provisions. They had their rifles, ammunition and

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blankets. Marshall knew they could get back, hunting their living as they went, following the lake shores and cutting across country. And neither he nor Tom considered for a moment giving up a pound of the precious supplies they had packed and toiled over for a thousand miles.

There was, however, the question of the advisability of going on. Together they could not make speed and carry more than a fifth of the food they had brought so far with the help of these three and many other Indians between each two trading-posts to the south. If they went on alone they must travel lightly, must depend upon the uncertain bands of caribou. It was inevitable that they would be overtaken by the Winter, would be caught on the barren grounds without adequate equipment or food.

They were to go blindly, haphazard, without the carefully made plans and preparations of former expeditions. They were to take greater risks than they had ever taken before. The chances of their returning were appallingly slender. To Marshall, too, there came a glimpse of the child and its mother he had left, but with both men there was a vision of some one waiting for them to the northward.

Marshall glanced at Tom. For a few seconds they looked at each other. They did not speak because there was nothing to say. There was not even a question in their eyes, for each knew what the other thought.

"We might as well mooch," said Tom as he turned to one of the canoes.

Marshall turned to the other. The loads were rearranged. They shoved off and stepped into the sterns. The Indians, refusing to believe, sat staring after them. Then, seeing the canoe and food they had demanded being taken from them, they sprang to their feet and shouted. One even lifted his rifle.

But Marshall and Tom, each shoving a heavily-loaded craft against the waves and the snow, did not turn their heads, did not look anywhere except toward the north.

CHAPTER II

THE FACE IN THE TEEPEE DOOR

NOTHING else could have been more discouraging than the remainder of the day. Snow beat into their faces in quick, fierce gusts. For several miles there was no alternative but to shove the big, heavily-loaded canoes straight into the wind. This became so strong in the sudden squalls that the two craft were stopped dead, as if an unseen hand had gripped them from behind. Always there was the disheartening, arm-wrenching strain which comes from the slow speed of a heavy body in the water, always the ceaseless exertion, the continuous effort, that make progress possible.

After two hours of this they gained the shelter of the western shore. They could make better speed, could relax from the supreme struggle in the open lake, but only to be confronted with growing evidences of the barren nature of the country which they would penetrate. The timber had begun to disappear before. Now there were great, treeless stretches. When a tree did grow it was stunted, gnarled, gnome-like with its wizened, storm-twisted trunk and dead top. These dwarfs, standing out against the skyline, typified to the two travelers as nothing else could what the ceaseless struggle for existence in the barren grounds must mean.

The land itself was becoming more and more a frozen bog. At the lake shore there were veritable glaciers, and huge chunks of the brown masses split off and floated away with the wind. Where there was no bog there were bare, rocky hills with boulder-strewn depressions between. Sometimes the higher land flattened out, but always there were boulders.

At six o'clock Marshall turned his canoe ashore at one of the rare spots where a few trees seemed to cling together for support against the terrific gales that sweep the barren grounds. Tom followed and began to set out the supper things while Marshall gathered dry wood.

"Think they'll follow around the shore?" asked Tom when the fire was going. "They know we'll never try to take all this outfit."

"May and they may not," answered Marshall. "But we won't take a chance. I don't think we'll ever be able to use the stuff, for I doubt if we come back this way. But I'd rather see it rot than have those Indians get it. We'll find an island near the north end of the lake and make a cache. We'll take one canoe, our outfit and about a hundred pounds of grub. If we should come back this way the cache will come in handy. If not, all right."

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"Kill our way, eh?"

"We've got to, Tom. We've got to take the chance of finding meat. The Telzoa is a bad river. We drop more than seven hundred feet between here and Dubawnt Lake, and the country is solid rock. We don't want a heavy canoe in the rapids, and we can't take time to portage a lot of stuff when we can't run them."

"Well, it's down-hill anyhow, and that'll help. Better get some more of that wood to take along. It seems to be getting scarcer."

At seven o'clock they were again in the canoes, creeping along the shore toward the north. For four hours they did not speak, did not stop paddling. The sun had set but it never became really dark and when they finally landed they could see across a narrow neck of land to the lake beyond.

"We'll portage here," said Marshall. "The map shows it will save us a good many hours' paddle. Might as well do it now so we won't have to handle the stuff twice."

It was midnight when the last of the supplies and the two canoes were on the north side of the isthmus. They turned one canoe over, spread their bedding beneath it and were asleep instantly. At six o'clock breakfast was eaten and they were again on the way.

Until eight o'clock that night they paddled with only one stop for lunch. The gale had ceased but there were severe squalls and an irritating head-wind. The lake was broad in places but with many points to give them shelter. Before sunset they reached what appeared to be the end of the lake and selected an island for their cache. At Tom's suggestion they had stopped in the afternoon to collect poles in one of the rare clumps of trees and with these they immediately began to erect a platform. Before darkness came all the supplies they would not take with them were piled upon it and the big canoe lashed firmly on top as a shelter.

"If those nitchies come this far to steal that stuff they'll be fooled," said Tom as they were smoking after supper. "They'll never be able to get out this far without a canoe if they do sight it."

"I hope we find it all right if we should come back this way," added Marshall. "Anyhow, we can travel now, and that's what we're here for."

At five in the morning they were in the canoe. Lightened, propelled by two paddles, it seemed to leap ahead of its own volition, so accustomed had the men become to the steady, heart-breaking tugging of the previous two days. For an hour they fairly exulted in their work.

They were now free of their burden, able to make all possible speed, and near them was the great river that was to spin their craft on and on into the North. With the ability to make speed came an increased desire for it. They paddled as if Jimmie Dunn might be around the next point, as if each hour might bring them some sign of his being near them.

But they skirted the shores of four deep bays before they finally discovered the river they sought, the Telzoa of the North, the "broad, shallow" river, and it was noon before they were whirled away by the swift current.

Before night the skill of both men was tested thoroughly in a succession of rapids which at any other time would have sent them ashore for a study of the course at least. But, as each appeared before them, crashing, foaming, most formidable of all in what it withheld from view, Tom would stand in the stern for a moment, pick a course, shout a direction or two to Marshall, and the next instant they were in the midst of it.

In all that succession of snarling, raging water, thickly strewn with huge, hidden boulders, with channels twisting like snakes among them, ledges causing chutes and falls, great masses of rock defying the water and tearing it into a mist, not once did the canoe strike, not once did anything more than spray come in over the side.

Drenched, chilled, with taut nerves, they rushed on until the river widened into a lake and night and weariness forced them ashore.

FOR four days more they shot down rapids and crossed lakes through which the river flowed. Always they pressed forward, sleeping a few hours and hurrying on. The last of the trees were passed. Rain soaked the black moss and there was no fuel. Drenched, nearly frozen, their short rests were hardly a relief from the endless toil, while raw bacon and a few raisins were their only food.

Then, at the south end of a large lake, a barren ground gale, straight out of the

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northwest, struck them, and for three days they lay soaked, shivering, hungry and impatient in their little tent. But the gale had only begun to abate when they were in the canoe again, pressing on into the North.

Seven days after entering the river, and four days' travel from the place where the Indians had deserted, they came to the fifth lake. For the first time since they had reached the barren grounds the sun shone and dried their clothes. As is always the case in high latitudes, when it became warm it became excessively so. Yet so dreary and comfortless had been their camping-spots for a week, so hungry were they for well-cooked food, simultaneously they broke into a shrill yell when the canoe rounded a point and they saw a grove of huge spruce trees at the foot of a small bay two miles ahead.

"The sun's turned around and we're going south!" exclaimed Tom in frank unbelief. "Or am I seeing wood in my sleep? Lord! Think of it! A bannock this noon!"

"What's that back on the hill?" asked Marshall excitedly, his interest in the trees forgotten.

"Bannock and caribou tongues!" whispered Tom. "Man! Man! What did we ever do to deserve this?"

He turned the canoe shoreward and fifteen minutes later they had separated and were scrambling up the rocky hillside. Only a few whispered words had been necessary, and when their rifles did speak it was almost together.

To neither man was the sight they had from the hill-top anything more than gratifying. To them it meant only food, a change in diet, a supply which would take them for several hundred miles with a comparatively light load. But to a stranger in the barren grounds few things could have been more impressive. There were acres and acres of deer, miles and miles of them, thousands upon thousands in a thick, flowing herd that separated and spread and eddied and rolled over the land as far as they could see.

The very density of the mass did not cause reckless shooting. Ammunition was precious and the farther from water an animal was killed the farther it had to be carried. They fired carefully, with much deliberation, picking the largest, fattest bucks and only those nearest the lake.

Each man shot four, and then, with the herd still milling frantically only a short distance away, they began to dress their meat. By night it had been butchered and paddled to the grove of spruce trees and for supper they had a meal exclusively of bannock and caribou tongues.

"These would be big spruce in Ontario," said Tom when the pipes were lighted. "Sure we haven't been heading south?"

"Certainly is unusual," commented Marshall. "I've heard of patches of timber in the barren grounds but never anything like this. Some of these trees are nearly three feet across at the butts."

They arose and walked through the little grove, which contained no more than thirty of the large trees and some smaller ones.

"Look!" cried Marshall as they came out on the north side. "It's a cairn!"

They ran forward to a heap of rocks nearly six feet high, unmistakably built by human hands.

"Eskimo," declared Tom.

"It's Jimmie!" shouted Marshall.

He began shoving and pulling the rocks off the top and in a few seconds uncovered a small brass cylinder familiar to them both. It was the same as those they had carried on previous expeditions and had left in many distant places.

Neither spoke as Marshall unscrewed the top. His fingers trembled so he could not extract the roll of paper inside and Tom, more calm, took it from his hands.

"It's two years old!" cried Marshall in dismay as he snatched the record and read the date.

He glanced hopelessly at Tom, but the woodsman, less perturbed, again took the paper, and read:

I reached here August fifteenth, alone. My Indians deserted me in July. I have satisfied myself that this is the Dubawnt waterway and will return to Great Slave Lake. I reached the Thelew from Clinto-Golden Lake and went nearly to its source. Near a rapids I found an old trail and traced it to a lake from which a river emptied into this lake.

I am starting back today, up the river, across to the Thelew, down that to the first branch that comes in from the west. I will ascend that as far as possible. By that time it should be Winter and I will strike straight west with the expectation of reaching Artillery Lake or Great Slave Lake near the sire of Captain Ford's Fort Reliance. I will then have only two hundred and fifty miles or so to Fort Resolution.

Such a course should take me through good

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caribou country and I do not anticipate any trouble in reaching Fort Resolution. I realize that it is a little shorter to the Hudson's Bay Company's outpost at Fond du Lac on Lake Athabasca, but I believe game conditions will be better west of here. Going south I would be ahead of the caribou, not meeting them as I will be going west.

When Tom stopped reading he looked at Marshall. Neither spoke. Jimmie should have reached Fort Resolution in November or December at the latest. Yet he had not been heard of there a year later than that. Four hundred miles to the west was the extent of travel necessary. Game should have been fairly plentiful. He had the experience of countless months in similar country, could take care of himself as well as an Indian. Yet he had not reached Fort Resolution.

"He would build a cairn at the mouth of this branch of the Thelew," commented Marshall at last. "If he had reached it."

"Where's this river he came here on?" asked Tom.

"Must be farther north along this shore. Probably around the next point."

Each knew now that there was no hope of finding Jimmie Dunn alive. It could not be possible. And yet the assurance that had driven them North into the barren grounds, that had sent them recklessly through unknown rapids, which had forced progress against wind, through snow, despite cold, would not now permit them to voice their certainty. They could not permit what their judgment declared to be inevitable.

"We'll dry and pound this meat," said Marshall absently.

"And then we'll be mooching up this river," added Tom.

With the aid of the sun and several fires they dried a great quantity of meat and the fourth day after reaching the isolated grove of spruce trees again started north. As Marshall had guessed, they found the mouth of the river around the next point.

It was a small stream, filled with rocks, shallow for long stretches, broken by irritating, boulder-clogged rapids. Their toil was excessive and ceaseless. Tracking, poling, dragging, lifting, portaging, often thigh-deep in the ice-water, cold, muscle-stiffened, without fuel for cooking or even the semblance of camp-comfort, they went on for seemingly endless days.

Their exertions were now more draining because their confidence had been shattered. A flickering hope alone drove them on. Neither could turn back while there was the faintest chance that their friend lived.

WHEN they reached the little lake of which Jimmie had written, from which a portage led to the Thelew, they found it bordered with new ice. Rain had fallen nearly every day and there had been no fuel for cooking or drying their clothes. Even their blankets were soaked and some of the meat which they had packed and lifted and shoved and hauled up the river was moldy.

Finding the portage trail to the Thelew was almost like another written communication from Jimmie and when at last they launched their canoe in the strange river they were cheered by finding wood in plenty.

Again they were headed northward, and down-stream. So far they had failed to find any traces of Jimmie having passed over the route two years before, but they knew they were following his path, that he would not have turned off without building another cairn and leaving another message. This conviction, and the fact that they were again being borne by a swift current, served to rouse their spirits and for the first time since sighting the caribou herd they talked of other things than the incidents of the day.

The second evening brought them to the mouth of the river which Jimmie had said he would ascend before striking across country toward Great Slave Lake. When still a quarter of a mile up-stream they saw the cairn which Marshall had predicted would be built there, but even at that distance they knew it had been partly torn down. They landed and scrambled up the bank to find stones scattered about and the little brass cylinder gone.

"Nitchies," said Tom.

"Took it to carry matches in," added Marshall. "Threw the record away. Anyhow, he went up this river as he said he would."

Tom turned at once to the canoe and again they began the toil of up-stream work in a country where rivers never know peace. For days they kept on, much of the time through a blinding snowstorm. There was wood enough now for an evening fire, if not always for shelter, for they were

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leaving the barren grounds to the east. But with the comfort of dry clothes at night came the necessity of cutting down on their rations. The pounded meat had vanished rapidly in the task of rebuilding what had been torn from their very bones by the cold and labor. Now, pushing on as vigorously as ever, they began to call upon their reserve strength.

At last they entered a little lake on the opposite side of which they saw several skin tents. Smoke rose from the edge of some stunted timber and they could even distinguish people on the shore.

"That's strange," commented Marshall. "I didn't know Indians used this country since a hundred years or more ago. When back at Fort Reliance the Indians didn't know anything about this district, except through vague reports of the oldest men."

"Anyhow they've got meat or they wouldn't have a fire," said Tom. "And if they hunt this country they might know something."

"They may be the ones who took the record!" exclaimed Marshall as he began to paddle.

Then he stopped suddenly, hopelessly.

"If they did," he said, "they would have turned it in at a Hudson's Bay post."

Fresh meat was a sufficient incentive to reach the encampment, even if they did not expect news of Jimmie Dunn, and they quickly paddled the intervening mile and a half. They had been seen when far out on the lake but there was no one on shore to meet them. Back among the tents men lay on the ground but none made any advances.

A little bewildered and suspicious, Marshall and Tom beat off the snapping dogs and walked toward the tents. As they drew near they spoke to the men but received only grunts in reply. Appearing to be casual and indifferent, they glanced around the encampment. As Tom looked one way Marshall wheeled suddenly in the other direction.

A tent flap had been lifted as if by a curious but timorous squaw. It was hastily pulled shut but not quick enough to prevent Marshall seeing the face in the opening.

"Jimmie!" he shouted. "Jimmie!"

He sprang forward at once, despite the quick movements of the men lying about him and their guttural growls. In a moment he had reached the tent and thrown the flap back.

"Jimmie!" he called as he bent to look within.

The tent was empty.

CHAPTER III

WRENCHED FAITH

TOM GILL, at Marshall's first cry, had rushed to his side and stooped to peer in. When they found no one inside each started to run around the tent. Their heads clashed, they staggered backward, and when they recovered and reached the rear of the teepee there was no one in sight.

Marshall believed he heard a rustle in the brush behind the encampment and instantly called:

"Jimmie! Jimmie! Come here!"

"You must have made a mistake," said Tom as Marshall stared helplessly around.

"No, it was Jimmie! I saw his face in the door of that tent! He has a beard, but I've seen Jimmie with a beard before. I'm sure."

"But what would he run for?" asked Tom.

Marshall did not answer, could not even speak in his complete mystification.

"Must be off his head from starving or freezing and is just living with these Indians," offered Tom.

"He's sane!" answered Marshall vehemently. "And, besides, he wouldn't run away like that if he were not. But I saw his face, and his eyes, and it wasn't insanity, Tom. It was fear I saw!"

"Fear!" snorted the woodsman. "Did you ever know Jimmie Dunn to be afraid of anything?"

"No, and that is why I know it is something we never suspected, something queer."

"It's something queer all right," agreed Tom, "and we are standing a long way from our canoe and rifles with a bunch of unfriendly nitchies in between."

Marshall was too intent upon the problem of Jimmie Dunn's unaccountable behavior to give any heed and Tom jerked his arm and whispered.

"Come on. We don't want to take any chances with this bunch. Every one's got a rifle with him. There's something funny about that."

He led Marshall back toward the shore, watching the Indians as he passed them.

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"I don't like this outfit," he muttered when they regained their canoe. "You said Indians never used this country, but these fellows do, only nobody knows it."

"What do you mean?" asked Marshall.

"Don't you see there's no white man's clothes on them? They're all wearing caribou-skin, like they used to a hundred years ago. That means they don't trade with the Hudson's Bay or any other posts. They don't even have canvas tents."

"But I saw several repeating rifles," objected Marshall. They've got to trade furs for them and for the ammunition."

"They trade through other Indians then. I tell you there's something out of the way about this bunch. They were hostile and an Indian don't keep his gun with him when he's lying around camp. Wonder if this old lad can understand what Chippewayan we know."

An Indian, clad entirely in skins, had left the group near the tents and was walking slowly toward them. Both Marshall and Tom were arranging their Chippewayan vocabulary, rusty from lack of use, and framing questions, when the man stopped about ten feet away.

"You'd better beat it," he said in English.

Neither of the white men spoke, so great was their astonishment.

"This country is not very healthy, especially in Winter," the Indian continued. "The Fall is almost here, and it's a long way to Fort Resolution."

"What's that white man doing with you?" demanded Marshall.

"That's his business, and ours."

"How about some meat?" interrupted Tom. "Got any?"

"What have you got?"

"Extra knife, couple of pounds of tea and some fishhooks."

"Thirty-thirty shells?"

"No."

"We haven't any meat."

"Just a quarter or two," said Tom, looking toward the racks where a large quantity was drying.

"If you're going to Resolution," said the Indian, "you'll find a stream at the end of the lake that will take you a little way. Then it's across country."

Tom had been studying the man closely during the colloquy and now he turned and looked out over the water.

"We're in no hurry," he said indifferently. "This looks like a nice place to camp. Guess we'll stick around a while."

"It's a very unhealthy place," observed the Indian casually as he turned and started back toward the tents.

"Come on," said Tom as he tugged at Marshall's sleeve. "Let's paddle out to that island and make camp. Then we can talk things over and keep watch of them and maybe learn something."

Marshall was still in a daze, still had the idea that he had come to rescue Jimmie Dunn and that he must do so.

"We've got to get him," he protested.

"We'll not get anything if we stick around here," answered Tom gruffly. "This is a darned queer outfit, and we've got to get together on some way of beating them before we start anything. Come on."

Reluctantly Marshall turned to the canoe. He took his place in the bow and they began to paddle. Neither spoke. Tom did not because he respected his friend's desire for silence. Marshall could not in the face of this mystery. After the weary weeks since he had started on the journey, after the hardship and exertion, the cold and the hunger, the shock of seeing Jimmie's terrified face looking from the tent door and his strange disappearance had completely unnerved him.

That his friend, the Jimmie of a thousand camp-fires in far-away places, the Jimmie whom he had pictured waiting, hoping, praying for him in the barren grounds, could have been the skin-clad figure which disappeared from the tent he could not believe. Yet always Jimmie's face arose to confirm his worst doubts and fears.

When they had beached the canoe on the island, a half-mile from the Indian village, he turned suddenly to Tom, a light of hope in his eyes.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "We haven't been fair to Jimmie. Perhaps he was a prisoner. How do we know but that he was dragged away?"

"Do you think," asked Tom calmly, "that one or two or three of those nitchies could have done it in those few seconds if Jimmie had seen us and wanted us to see him? Did you hear any noise, any signs of a rumpus? You got there too soon to have that the reason."

"Then what do you make of it?"

"Nothing so far," was the answer.

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"That nitchie talking English as good as you or me is the secret of it though."

"But what can he have to do with Jimmie running away?"

"Well, Jimmie couldn't have said anything to us without that fellow understanding for one thing. I think we can learn a lot more about Jimmie's queerness if we find out something about this bunch of bow and arrows. What's that you said about the Indians never coming in here?"

"In the old days, before the traders got into the Northwest, the Indians traveled the whole country from Hudson's Bay nearly to the Mackenzie," answered Marshall. "They came south to the timber in Winter and went north into the barren grounds in Summer, some of them as far as the mouth of the Coppermine. They lived on caribou and followed its migrations."

"What did they quit for?"

"Hudson's Bay Company, I suppose. After posts were established and the Indians found they could get things for fur, they trapped more and traveled less. Anyhow, when Captain Back went through west of here to the Arctic Ocean in 1833 and 1834 he couldn't get an Indian to go with him, and he couldn't find one who knew anything about the country more than a few miles from Great Slave Lake."

"And all the Indians we've seen in this North country wear white men's clothes, especially in Summer," said Tom.

"What has that to do with it?"

"These fellows wear skin clothes, capotes and leggings, and in Summer. That means they don't trade with the Hudson's Bay Company or with any free-trader. They're in a country where it ain't supposed Indians ever go. The leader is a man who knows as much English as we do. The answer to it all is somewhere in that combination."

"You mean these are outlaw Indians, sort of a renegade band that for some reason never goes near white people?" asked Marshall.

"I wasn't meaning anything, but maybe that's it," said Tom.

"But that doesn't explain Jimmie."

"Maybe Jimmie explains that."

Marshall turned angrily upon his companion.

"You don't mean that he's the leader of this band, that he's turned Indian, and bad Indian at that?"

"Look here, lad," said Tom gently. "I know how you feel about Jimmie because I feel the same way. You didn't have to argue any with me to get me to come along on this trip. But if I do feel that way about a man I don't keep my eyes shut just the same. You've got to admit that Jimmie acted darned queer when we came up.

"If he had been lost or starved and was traveling with this bunch until he got a chance to get out, do you suppose for a minute he wouldn't have been waiting out to meet us today? Being two years without seeing white-folks or eating white men's grub would make a man weep with joy if we were strangers, let alone his best friends."

"But that's impossible, Tom. Nothing could make Jimmie desert his own race like that. You know he never even had any romantic notions of Indian life. No, you were right at first. He must be insane."

"But why would that nitchie warn us off the lake?" continued the woodsman. "There's no use our talking this way, lad. The only thing to do is to stick around that bunch and find out something about them. Let's make camp and cook something. Then we can rig up some scheme or other."

THEY carried their packs back to the edge of the brush. While Tom began the preparations for a meal Marshall gathered wood. They cooked supper, set up their tent, stowed their few belongings within it and then, each armed with a rifle, shoved off the canoe and paddled slowly across the lake to the Indian camp.

It was dark when they started and Tom's last act was to throw an armful of wood upon the fire.

"They'll think we're still here," he said, and when he took up his paddle he turned the canoe to the south so that they could approach the Indians in the shadow of the shore.

As a result of these tactics they drifted slowly to a spot directly in front of the tents without being seen or smelled by the dogs. As they sat in the canoe, undecided as to whether they should land and approach the tents, their attention was arrested by a group of Indians standing around a tall,

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narrow, peculiarly shaped structure. Behind them a large fire lighted up the scene, but the strange teepee was so far away it could not be seen distinctly.

Marshall recognized it at once as a conjuror's tent, narrow at the bottom, closed at the top and erected with small, pliable poles.

As they looked an Indian got down to his hands and knees and crawled inside. Two men and a woman, stark naked despite the frosty air, followed him, and then from behind the tent came the Indian who had spoken to them on the shore in the afternoon. He, too, was without clothing of any kind.

For a time he stood in front of the low opening in the tent, facing the Indians gathered between him and the fire. At last he began to speak and for fifteen minutes he kept up a steady flow of words, many of which were understood by the two white men in the canoe. They could not catch the meaning or intent of his entire speech but they knew unmistakably that he referred to them several times. At last he ceased speaking and entered the conjuror's tent.

For another fifteen minutes there came sounds of what was nothing more than a jabber within the tent. Then the flap was thrown back and the three naked men and woman crawled out.

The speaker again faced the Indians, the others close about him. In one hand he held a board two feet long and six inches broad. One end had been whittled down to a wide knob. The man swung this in front of him for a time while he talked and then, with a quick movement, opened his mouth and swallowed the board.

"Holy Mackinaw!" whispered Tom Gill, his amazement robbing him of all caution.

Marshall, who had been watching closely, for he knew what was to come, did not exclaim. But he did stare in astonishment at the knob of the board protruding from the Indian's mouth.

For five minutes or more the man walked about among the Indians with the knob projecting from between his teeth. Then he rejoined the naked group in front of the tent, and the next instant the board was in his hands.

Immediately the unclothed Indians entered the tent and the long, uninterrupted, unintelligible jabber was resumed. At last they all came out and after them crawled the first Indian who had entered. For a moment he sat on the ground as if too weak to rise and then crawled through the crowd to the fire, where he sat on his heels, his hands outspread to the blaze, his head sunk between his knees.

Immediately the group broke up and moved over to the fire. They gathered about it silently, whispering if they spoke at all. Marshall and Tom scanned the faces eagerly but Jimmie was not among them.

The two white men were stiff and cold from their long, motionless watch and each stirred to relieve his cramped muscles. Tom cautiously lifted his paddle and was about to shove the canoe away from shore when they heard a slight noise in the darkness beside them. A soft object thudded against the side of the canoe and dropped at Tom's knees.

Quietly they crept on along the shore until the camp was behind them and then turned out toward their island. They did not speak until they had landed and again built up the fire. Tom knelt beside it and drew from his pocket a folded piece of unsmoked leather bound into a ball with a piece of babiche.

"What's that?" demanded Marshall.

"It dropped into the canoe when we heard that noise beside us, after the performance," answered the woodsman as he cut the thong and unfolded the piece of white leather.

"It's a note from Jimmie!" cried Marshall as he jerked it from Tom's hands. "Written with charcoal!"

He bent closer to the light and read aloud:

"Leave. Quick."

"Leave nothing!" exclaimed Tom. "What's he think we came for?"

He glared at Marshall as if he had written the message and then he tore the piece of leather from his friend's hands.

"Say," he demanded after a careful scrutiny, "is that Jimmie's writing?"

"Jimmie's! Whose could it be?"

"If that naked devil can speak English so good he can write it."

Marshall took the leather and studied the message.

"I couldn't tell," he said uncertainly. "It's printed, in big letters, with a piece of charcoal. Do you think——"

"Of course," declared Tom. "Jimmie wouldn't tell us to get out."

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Marshall was studying the message again.

"It is Jimmie!" he cried suddenly. "Look here."

He pointed to the bottom of the piece of leather where, in smaller characters, and slightly blurred by the folding, could be seen the figures:

7/15.

"I don't see how that means anything," said Tom, "except he intended it for July fifteenth and now it's September."

"It is Jimmie," repeated Marshall. "July fifteenth is that date on Great Bear Lake six years ago. You've heard us speak of it. That trip we made alone. Jimmie was sure I would know, and no one else in the world knows it."

"I see," said Tom. "He used that so that you would be sure it came from him and not from that naked devil who talks English."

"But look here, lad," he continued after a moment's thought, "it don't leave us any better off. If Jimmie could get close enough to the canoe to throw that note into it, why didn't he get in himself? He isn't any prisoner. He could get away if he wanted to."

"That's impossible!" protested Marshall. "You and I know Jimmie. We know he isn't that sort. Nothing in the world could make me believe it. Think what you are accusing him of? A man like Jimmie to take with a bunch of dirty Indians, to go back on his two best friends when he knows what we've gone through to get to him!"

"Look here," answered the woodsman doggedly. "You and I know Jimmie Dunn as he used to be. We don't either of us know what two years in the barren grounds has done to him. Look how even you and I have lived, no better than an Indian half the time, and we got just as dirty as the rest, Winters, and thought musk-ox guts was fine eating. Now he'd had two years thinking he can't get out."

"But Jimmie would never have given up that way. I tell you I know him. He'd never have given up!"

IT WAS only by this reiteration of his faith that Marshall Wells could meet the woodsman's more practical, less emotional, deductions. The latter accepted only what he saw and heard while Marshall, to believe the worst, must first battle down all his faith in Jimmie Dunn, a faith that no amount of evidence could kill.

By his attitude and silence Marshall finally ended the discussion. For a time he sat quietly beside the fire, adjusting his mind to the inevitable. But when at last he did look up it was not hopelessly, in sorrow. His teeth were clenched when he spoke:

"But even if you are right, our job isn't done! I came up here to find Jimmie Dunn and now that I've found him I'm going to take him out."

"Now you're talking!" replied the woodsman enthusiastically. "We'll yank that young fellow out of this if we have to knock him down with a club first, if we have to tie him up and pack him clear to Lake Athabasca. But, say! We've been so busy talking over that note you haven't told me the meaning of the performance we saw tonight."

"That was a conjuror's tent," explained Marshall. "I recognized it because they are always the same shape. And the naked one who talked English is the conjuror. That explains his manner when he spoke to us this afternoon. An Indian must have been sick, the one who crawled in. And the conjuror was making medicine to cure him. That business of swallowing the board is one of their stock tricks.

"They pretend to swallow something big and show their power by pulling it out again. I can't tell you just how it is done, except that it is some sleight-of-hand performance and he substitutes a knob of wood whittled like the knob on the board, holding it in his mouth. It is supposed to be big medicine.

"But what worries me is that he talked about us. He doesn't want us around and if he can just persuade the band that we are the cause of the illness he can start no end of trouble for us. What we are going to do we had better do soon, before he can have time to stir up too much feeling. What do you say to starting over there now and just bulling the thing through?"

"Too dark," objected Tom. "And besides, we want to do this thing openly. These Northern Indians ain't got any nerve and I'd rather face them in daylight than give them a chance to sneak around in the dark. In the morning we'll be at that camp

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by daylight. If Jimmie sees us and starts to run we'll just take after him and keep on until we catch him. If any of those nitchies start after us, all we'll have to do is cock a rifle to send them scampering. No, daylight's best. There won't be any fight then, and night gives them the chance they like best."

Tom could waken at any hour and as they crawled into their little tent he agreed to be up in plenty of time to paddle the half-mile to the mainland before daylight.

"We'll land down the shore a ways and come on to the camp from behind," he said as he wrapped his blankets about him.

The days were not nearly so long as when they had been deserted by their Indians but still there was a comparatively short night. They had been asleep less than four hours when Tom awakened, struck a match and looked at his watch.

"Get up, lad," he called as he shook Marshall. "I've slept in. We'll have to hurry."

He was out of the tent before Marshall was thoroughly awake but in a moment he was back, feeling about among the blankets near the door.

"The canoe's gone," he announced suddenly in a low voice. "The canoe and what little grub we had here in the tent. They've fixed us right. We're stranded on this island with nothing to eat and no chance to get off."

CHAPTER IV

THE LIGHT ON THE WATER

IN THE darkness and later in the first light of dawn they hunted the shoreline. It was not that they hoped to find the canoe. Only their situation was so desperate they could not overlook any chance to escape.

They were in the center of a district nearly two hundred miles in extent each way which, so far as was known, had been crossed by only one white man, and that one hundred and fifty years before. With the exception of this strange band of undoubtedly outlaw Indians it was uninhabited. They were about sixty-three degrees north, on the edge of the barren grounds, in a land where Summer is a mockery and Winter an interminable torment.

But with these things they had often taken their chances, were willing to cope with again. What concerned them now was quick, inevitable starvation. There were not enough trees on the island to make a raft that would float more than one.

Neither man spoke of how they had played into the Indians' hands by camping on the island. They had only followed the usual custom, for starved, roving Indian dogs render a mainland camp unsafe unless a platform is erected for the storage of supplies. Near Indians an island is always chosen.

Daylight showed a narrow rim of ice along the shore of their prison but they knew that weeks would pass before it would be strong enough to take them to the mainland. Foodless, with no chance to get food, they could not last half the time.

Both Marshall and Tom had spent so much time in the far North, had met so many situations of equally vital importance, they recognized instantly their condition. There was no need to discuss it, and when at last they sat down in the door of their tent it was the cause of their plight of which they spoke.

"I told you last night those nitchies would rather sneak around in the dark than meet any one in the daylight," said Tom. "They waited until we were asleep and then paddled over, took our canoe and reached into the tent and stole what they dared steal, which happened to be the bag with what little grub we had left."

"That's why Jimmie warned us to get out," said Marshall.

The remark silenced both of them. It aroused instantly in the mind of each the question of what hand Jimmie had had in this fiendish thing. It was abhorrent to them that Jimmie could have been a partner in what was nothing less than slow and ruthless murder, and yet there were his strange actions of the day before, his warnings, his refusal to escape.

"We've got to get him out of that whichever it is," growled Tom, who took it for granted that their minds had been working along similar lines.

"I won't believe it!" protested Marshall. "Jimmie Dunn would give his life any day to save us. Do you mean to tell me that you can believe he would even acquiesce in condemning us to die of slow starvation before his eyes?"

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He jumped to his feet as if to get away from the thought, to hide himself from this specter of his friend's degeneracy.

"I'm going to take a run around the island," he said savagely. "There may be ptarmigan or rabbits on it, enough to last us until freeze-up."

"If you do see any," called Tom, "set snares. We can't waste ammunition."

Marshall was gone for fifteen minutes. When he returned his hands were empty, his face hard.

"Come here, Tom," he said, and he led the way back to the center of the island.

In an open space half surrounded by stunted spruce trees he stopped. Tom pushed through and looked over Marshall's shoulder to see two human skeletons lying side by side on the ground. Beyond was a rough shelter of brush and small poles, the blackened circle of a fire before it.

"Not the first time they've worked this game," said the woodsman. "We sure played into their hands when we came over here to camp."

"Their own people, too," said Marshall. "Those are Indian skulls."

"Haven't any nerve even among themselves," growled Tom. "Well, we'll show them that they can't handle a white man that way."

Marshall knew that Tom's gruff tone was intended to minimize the horror and the significance of their discovery, but it served only to bring the immediate future before him more vividly. Weak from hunger but still hoping, still striving and devising, they would have always the knowledge that two others had fought a similar battle before them, and that they had lost, had been doomed from the beginning.

"I'm going on around the island," he said as he followed Tom away from the spot. "There might be some driftwood big enough for a raft."

He had no hope that he would be successful but sought to free himself of depression through activity. He followed the shore a little way, then cut across to the other side. Zig-zagging, watching closely, he covered the entire island in an hour. When at last he returned to camp it was to announce that there wasn't a stick on the island three inches through, and not enough of these to make a raft big enough to support one man.

"We don't need a raft," answered Tom. "I got an idea just as you came up. We'll make a boat."

"Boat!"

"Oh, not much of a one, but good enough to get us to mainland. Mind those Eskimo skin-boats up on the Coppermine?"

"Yes, but we haven't any skins."

"No, but we have got a waterproof tent. We'll just make a rough framework, round or square or any old shape, pull the tent over it and paddle off. If it leaks we'll bale, and paddle the harder."

"That will be easy!" cried Marshall excitedly. "There's another island less than a quarter of a mile from this one to the west and that is no more than a quarter of a mile from that long point running out from the shore."

"We're sure of it," said Tom.

Then he added grimly, yet with eager anticipation:

"And we'll land into that nitchie camp like the angel of death going on a four-day bust. The first thing I do will be to hit that Jimmie lad over the head with a club to see if I can knock the evil out of him, or the sense into him, and the second will be to plug that naked devil that swallowed the board. I never killed a man in my life, or wanted to, but a fellow's never too old to cut a new trail."

Marshall knew that Tom was convinced that Jimmie, for some unaccountable reason, had abandoned his race, his friends, everything, that he chose to live with this band of renegade Indians. In his heart Marshall refused to accept such a thing, but his reason told him that his friend's actions justified Tom's belief.

Again he sought surcease in activity and began at once to take down the tent.

"We'll move back to the center of the island where they can't see what we're up to," he said.

They worked swiftly. Marshall, with Tom's specifications, cut and trimmed a number of poles. These the woodsman hewed on one side so that they would bend easily and then, with Marshall's help, lashed them together in the shape of a bowl. In less than two hours they were ready to stretch the tent over it.

"Now we'll carry it to the far side of the island, as close to that next island as we can, and in half an hour we'll be on mainland," said Tom as he looked with satisfaction at

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the result of their work. "Man! Man! Wait until after dark tonight!"

They found a deep place between two rocks and carefully lowered the clumsy craft into the water.

"Fine," said Tom as he watched the bottom. "Now you get in while I hold her. Sit nitchie-fashion in the bottom because she'll tip easy."

Marshall stepped in carefully, but no sooner was his weight entirely in the craft than water began to stream through the tent.

"Stay in," commanded Tom. "She may quit when she's wet."

But the water flowed even faster and Marshall got out.

"We'll double it," said Tom without disappointment. "Two thicknesses should do the trick."

They lifted the boat on to the rocks and took off the tent. It was more difficult to restretch it so that two thicknesses were used but at last the job was completed and Marshall again tested it.

More slowly this time, but still too fast for them to consider traveling more than a hundred yards, the water streamed in through the cloth.

Neither man was dismayed as they stood there looking thoughtfully at the queer craft. They were real woodsmen, men who believed and had demonstrated hundreds of times that in the fertile mind dwells a successful device for any emergency which may arise.

"I've got it!" cried Marshall suddenly. "I kept a couple of pounds of deer tallow in my war bag for greasing shoepacs. The Indians didn't get it. We'll take off the tent, dry it thoroughly, melt the grease and rub it in. Then she'll be watertight."

"The clear rig," agreed Tom as he started to remove the tent from the frame.

A FIRE was built, the cloth thoroughly dried, the grease melted in a kettle and part of the tent soaked in it.

"I don't see how water can get through that," said Marshall when the task was completed. "Let's try it again."

The tent was stretched over the rough framework, lashed to the top poles and again the craft was placed in the water.

"Let her rest there while I make a couple of paddles," said Tom as he picked up his ax.

In ten minutes he had hacked out two rough blades, narrow and clumsy but sufficient for their short journey.

"Pile in, lad," he commanded as he held the sides.

Marshall stepped into the boat for the third time. As he crouched in the center, looking down anxiously between his feet, the bottom remained dry.

"It works!" he cried. "Get the blankets and other stuff."

Tom loaded the boat with all their possessions and then carefully stepped in beside Marshall.

"We're off!" he shouted as he shoved against a rock and they went spinning dizzily out from shore.

Tom held a paddle over the side and stopped the circular motion, though so suddenly they almost capsized.

"Now let's make that island quick," he said as he began to paddle.

"We can't!" cried Marshall. "See how she's leaking!"

"It's now or never, lad," was the answer.

But, though both paddled, and though they quickly adapted themselves to the eccentric motions of their craft, they barely made progress. Fifty yards from shore there was a foot of water in the bottom, and nearly a quarter of a mile remained.

"We've got to turn back, Tom," panted Marshall. "We'll sink in another hundred yards."

"Guess you're right," was the reply. "And we'll have to hustle to get there."

The boat was so waterlogged they could barely propel it when at last they grounded near the spot where they had set out.

"I've got a notion," said Tom when the soaked blankets were being spread out on shore, "that if we cut down all the brush on the island and bind it together we can make a raft that will do the trick. Anyhow, we haven't got anything else to do but try."

Marshall did not have much faith in the plan but in the face of his friend's optimism and dogged determination to escape he could do no less than agree. They began to cut numberless small poles and bind them together with roots.

"It will take every stick on the island and maybe then some," Tom declared in the middle of the afternoon. "But I believe we can do it."

They worked steadily, but the brush was scarce and some of it so far away dark-

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ness came before they had collected more than enough to float one man. Since daylight they had been hard at work without a thing to eat. They had discovered early that there were no birds or rabbits on the island and they had not wanted to use up their ammunition trying to shoot a fish along the shore.

"There's that grease on the tent," said Marshall after they had lighted a small fire of dry twigs too small for use in the raft.

"Guess we can scrape some of it off, or chew it off," added Tom.

He brought the tent to the fire and laid it down between them. For an hour they chewed and sucked at the cloth.

"That will help a lot," said Tom when there was none left. "We must have got a pound a piece."

Marshall arose to place more fuel on the fire.

"What's that?" he demanded suddenly. "There's a light out on the lake."

Tom jumped to his feet to look over the rock behind which they had sought shelter from a cold northwest wind. So far out it was only a flickering dot of yellow, a tiny flame could be seen against the blackness of the mainland.

"Now what in Sam Hill is that?" demanded the woodsman.

"It's up in that bay beyond the camp," said Marshall. "It looks like a light in a canoe."

"Whoever heard of using a light to paddle by? It's some of that naked devil's funny business, conjuring."

For a time they stood looking at the light. They were on the side of the island and hidden from the Indian encampment, but as they watched they heard the barking of dogs, while a dull glow in the sky told of blazing camp-fires.

"Let's get out to the point and see what's going on," suggested Marshall as he picked up his rifle.

The island on which they were held prisoners was half a mile long but not more than a hundred and fifty yards across in the widest place. The western point was almost opposite the Indian camp, and as they were near the middle they had to walk a quarter of a mile to reach a spot where they could look across the water to the collection of tents.

"Something's going on over there," said Tom. "They're mighty excited and every one's running around."

It was not possible to see distinctly at such a distance but they could hear shouts and screams and the fires flashed and twinkled as Indians passed between them and the lake.

"Must be that light on the water," suggested Marshall. "They don't understand it or it's some scheme of the conjuror's. But look! The light is getting closer. Some one must be coming out to the island."

He spoke excitedly and, while he did not express the thought, Tom knew that he hoped it might be Jimmie Dunn.

"Maybe he has come to his senses," said the woodsman. "But that's traveling too slow for a canoe being paddled, lad. The wind is straight from it to the island here but it crawls along like it was a log of something."

The excitement in the Indian camp increased but the two men now confined their attention to the strange light that slowly approached them. It was near enough so that they could see it dancing on the waves. It seemed, too, to come by alternate rushes and pauses, and occasionally it darted to the right and then to the left.

"Whatever it is, it won't be long now," said Tom. "It's going to hit the island down near the middle. We'd better get down so we can see."

They walked slowly along the shore, their perplexity growing as the strange light came nearer. Whether it was a raft sent adrift to be carried by the wind to the island, whether it was something to distract their attention from a silent approach in the darkness from another direction, they could only guess. The last thought made them uneasy and they stopped often to look about them and listen.

"I only hope it is something to draw us off and they land on the other side of the island," said Tom. "It will give us a chance at their canoe."

They had stopped to look behind them, and when they turned to go on Marshall cried out—

"It's gone!"

"It's some one on a raft floating toward us and they blew it out," he added when he had recovered from his amazement.

"That or the wind," added Tom. "Whichever it is, we'll soon see."

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They went on until they were only a few yards from their camp-fire.

"It ought to strike about here," said the woodsman.

"I think I see it now!" exclaimed Marshall. "Out that way! See it! It's a canoe! Empty!"

"Lie low," whispered Tom as he crouched close to the ground. "There might be some one in it waiting for a pot-shot at us."

They sprawled out behind a boulder while the dark object bobbed closer to shore.

"It's our canoe," whispered Marshall after a moment. "And it's empty, too."

He arose and walked down to the water just in time to take hold of the gunwale and keep the canoe from pounding against the rocks.

Tom was at his side and they lifted the craft out of reach of the waves.

"There's what made the light," said Marshall. "It's a kettle of grease with a moss wick in it. The wind must have blown it out."

"And there's a couple of skin bags of dried meat in the bottom, too," exclaimed Tom. "What's that tied to the middle thwart?"

"A piece of leather!" cried Marshall excitedly. "Another note from Jimmie!"

He turned and ran toward the rock behind which they had built their fire. When Tom reached him he had blown the dying embers to a tiny blaze, added more fuel and was crouching close to the flame, the leather spread out in his hands.

"What's he say?" asked the woodsman breathlessly.

"I can't make it out. It's written with charcoal and partly blurred by the folding. Here! Now I have it," and he turned the leather around.

"Get away from here quick," he read. "There's only one small dark spot left."

CHAPTER V

THE CONJUROR

"ONE small dark spot left," repeated Tom. "What does he mean?"

Marshall did not answer. His despondent thoughts gave no room for conjecture as to the meaning of this strange message in which nothing related in any way to their task of rescuing Jimmie Dunn.

"Tom," he said suddenly, "you were right. Jimmie doesn't want to escape. If he could get this canoe and meat off to us he could have come himself. I couldn't believe it until this."

"Of course," answered the woodsman calmly. "I thought so all along. But that doesn't make our work any different. There's just one thing to do."

"You mean go over there and take him?"

"If we have to knock him on the head. I'm itching to get in among those nitchies now, daylight or dark."

Marshall was silent for a moment. All conceivable motives for Jimmie's action passed through his mind. Only one seemed plausible, and it made him pause.

"Tom," he said at last, "there's just one reason why Jimmie should act this way. He's been with this band for two years now. There's a child there in that camp, his child. He won't leave it and he can't take it out. I don't think we have the right to decide such a question for him."

"Child nothing!" snorted Tom. "You know Jimmie Dunn too well for that. He's not only the straitest-laced lad I ever knew but with all his traveling through this country and being with Indians, he wouldn't touch one if he could help it. They made him feel like most men feel when they see a snake. You've got to think up something else than that to suit me."

"But what other reason could there be? Jimmie could have left this band any time in the last two years if he had wanted to. He can handle himself as well in the bush as you or I, and even if he has been a prisoner, they couldn't watch him so closely but that he could have had his chance to escape long before this. And then yesterday afternoon when he ran away from that tent, and last night, and again tonight. What other explanation can there be?"

"The answer's in that small dark spot he tells about."

"But that doesn't mean anything," retorted Marshall, "unless he's taking it for granted we know something else."

"It looks like it," agreed Tom, "but we don't know, and there's only one way to find out."

Marshall answered by rising to his feet, his rifle in his hands.

"We might as well take all our outfit," he said. "We don't know whether we will have time to come back this way, and there isn't enough of it to bother us."

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They carried their tent, blankets and small bags of personal equipment down to the canoe. Tom untied one of the skin bags and drew out two pieces of dried meat.

"We can chew these as we paddle," he said.

"We want to strike shore some distance from the camp," suggested Marshall as he got into the bow. "Why not go down into that bay where the canoe came from? It will be against the wind, but there is the chance that Jimmie is still down there."

"It's a slim chance, but the place is as good as any. You see, that light in the canoe wasn't only for us to see but for the Indians, too. Jimmie knew they would miss this canoe in the morning. That light dancing across the water looked spooky, and he could twist it into an alibi for himself. It's probably what all the fuss is about over there in camp."

Only a few strokes were necessary to carry them out far enough to see the Indian camp-fires.

"Still running around in circles," said Tom. "Hope they keep it up. With the dogs barking and every one excited, we've got a better chance to sneak in on them."

They paddled on, straight into the growing northwest wind, and in half an hour entered a deep bay nearly a mile up the shore from the encampment.

"There's some thick brush," said Tom as he turned the canoe landward. "We can hide the canoe and things in it."

After everything was carried back to a secure hiding-place the meat was lifted into the branches of a small spruce to make it safe from the Indian dogs. Each man took another piece and they struck back to a ridge and followed it south.

"There's a line of brush right back of their camp," said Marshall when they had gone about half way. "We can get up to the edge of it without being seen or heard. Then it will be only a step."

"Yes, and we'll have to make that step a quick one. And whatever we do, lad, we mustn't be separated. When we get in among them we'll keep back to back, and the first thing we will do will be to nab Jimmie."

"And no shooting unless we have to," added Marshall.

"Of course not! That would be foolish. But for the Lord's sake, lad, if they start anything shoot fast and straight. There must be a dozen hunters in that outfit."

"And what we do after that there's no use in planning. All right."

It was nearly an hour after they landed, so careful had been their progress, before they entered the fringe of brush behind the camp-fires. These were now only glowing beds of coals.

"They've quieted down and gone to sleep," whispered Tom as they crept forward side by side. "That makes it all the better."

At last they thrust their heads out past the edge of the brush and looked toward the camp. One fire blazed up for an instant and lighted the place.

"They're gone!" Marshall cried aloud in his astonishment.

"Cleaned out bag and baggage!" Tom added incredulously, and he began to swear in fierce whispers.

"Go easy, lad," he warned when Marshall arose hurriedly to his feet. "Watch for a trap."

He joined his companion and together they made their way forward. When they had satisfied themselves that all the tents and canoes were gone they searched the camp-site. Except for the ashes of the fires, the bare poles of the tents and drying racks, nothing remained. Men, women and children, dogs, every one and everything had departed.

"Which way do you suppose they went?" asked Marshall.

"Didn't that conjuror say there was a stream coming into this lake from the west that we could take?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's either that way or the way we came."

"But they might go across country," objected Marshall. "These Indians often travel that way. The fact that they took their canoes doesn't mean anything because they might paddle across the lake and leave them."

"Anyhow," said Tom, "the only thing for us to do now is to get back to our canoe. This lake isn't very big and we can run around the entire shore as soon as daylight comes. Then we can catch them whichever way they went because they can't travel, with their women and children, as fast as we can."

"And that river flowing in from the west can't be far from our canoe," added Marshall

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as they started. "That bay is the only place it could enter. We've seen the rest of the south and west shores."

They regained the canoe in half an hour. Tom immediately reached into the spruce tree for one of the skin bags of dried meat.

"This is good grub, and a little goes a long ways," he said as he untied the thong, "but I seem to need a lot of it tonight after being empty all day."

"What's this?" he cried suddenly. "Look here! It's one of those little brass cylinders! Inside this bag!"

"From Jimmie!" exclaimed Marshall as he sprang forward.

"Quick, Tom! Get a fire started!"

"Easy on the fire, lad," the woodsman cautioned. "Let's make sure it can't be seen first. We don't know what those nitchies have planned or where they are."

He began to search among the rocks and finally found a place back near the ridge which was effectively screened on all sides. In a moment he had a fire going. When it afforded a reading light Marshall unscrewed the cap of the little brass tube and pulled out a small roll of paper.

"It's a regular book!" he cried when he found fifteen or twenty thin sheets, each covered on both sides by small, crowded lines in the unmistakable penmanship of Jimmie Dunn.

Tom sat down with an armful of dry sticks beside him, ready to keep the fire burning brightly, and Marshall began to read.

"This is dated in June of last year," he said, "more than a year ago. I'll begin at the beginning:

"MY NAME is James Wilson Dunn. My home is in Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A. For the last twelve years I have spent nearly all my time on exploratory trips in northern Canada, always, until this expedition, in company with Marshall Wells. Mr. Wells having married, I left Chicago a year ago last Fall, going to Fort Resolution on Great Slave Lake in the Winter and outfitting at that post for a trip into the country east of the lake.

"The object of the expedition was to trace the Thelew, or Teh-lon, River to its source and examine the country lying north of Lake Athabasca and between the Dubawnt River and Great Slave Lake. With the exception of Samuel Hearne, no white man has been in this district, and he passed through in the Spring of 1771, traveling overland with more than two hundred Indians. As his map has since been proven inaccurate, sometimes being several degrees off, and as he merely traced small lakes he crossed by canoe and short stretches of rivers across which he ferried, nothing definite has been known of the country.

"Also, since Hearne's time, the habits of the Indians have changed greatly. They no longer roam over great stretches of country, being content to remain within a comparatively short radius of Hudson's Bay Company and other posts. As far back as 1833, when Captain George Back reached the east end of Great Slave Lake and began his preparations for his journey to the Arctic Ocean in a search for Captain Ross and his ship, he was unable to find any Indians who had penetrated far to the eastward of the lake.

"Some very old men remembered having gone farther in their childhood but nothing definite could be learned from any Indian accounts. They knew there was a Thelew River, but where it came from and where it went no one knew.

"More recent explorations have established the mouth of the river and its lower reaches south and west of Aberdeen Lake, on the Dubawnt waterway, but the great stretch of country surrounding its upper course and source has remained unknown.

"Accompanied by four Chippewayan Indians I started from Fort Resolution on the ice and carrying two birch canoes on sledges. We made good progress to Clinton-Colden Lake and crossed over to a large lake lying to the east. By this time the ice in the streams was gone and we found a river that took us to the Thelew.

"Though I had fully explained to the Indians at Fort Resolution where I intended to go and what I intended to do, and they had agreed to accompany me, they refused to go farther when we reached the Thelew. For some time they had been sulky. Some had expressed fear in going into a country of which they knew nothing. One of the men had some skin disorder due to an incorrect diet. It took the form of small boils. At once this was seized upon as evidence that he had been conjured and that the same fate would come to them

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all if they continued. Neither threats nor promises had any effect against their superstitious fear.

"Having gone that far, and knowing that my route would take me south to within two hundred miles or so of Fort Resolution or Fort Chippewayan, I determined to go on alone. I took the smaller of the two canoes, one that I could portage alone easily, and nearly all the supplies, leaving the Indians their rifles and enough ammunition for them to hunt their way back to Great Slave Lake.

"Although it was much harder work and the river was swift, and with many portages, I made good progress. Traced the Thelew as far south as latitude sixty-two and then turned back down-stream. As it was only the latter half of July, I had more time than I anticipated, and when I found an old trail leading from the Thelew eastward I followed it to a lake from which I went on eastward down a small river to a lake out on the barren grounds. It is well known that in this country the southern limit of the barren grounds drops quickly, running practically southeast and northwest from north of Great Slave Lake to the coast of Hudson's Bay above Churchill.

"At the north end of this lake I found a large river flowing on northward and from its size, and from observations for latitude and longitude, I knew that I had reached the Telzoa River, or Dubawnt waterway, leading north to Chesterfield Inlet.

"On returning to the mouth of the small river by which I had come I found a remarkable grove of about thirty spruce trees, some as large as are found more than a thousand miles to the south. Knowing that they would attract any one traveling through that country, I built a cairn beside the grove and left a message. That was the fifteenth of August, last year.

"I started back immediately, reached the Thelew and descended it to the first stream coming in from the west. I turned up this, intending to go as far as the water permitted and then abandon the canoe and proceed overland to Great Slave Lake. At the mouth of this river I built another cairn and left another message. That was the first week in September. The first day up the river I overtook a party of Indians, the first human beings I had seen in two months.

"Two things immediately marked these people as unusual. In the first place they were in the center of a territory in which no Indians had been for a hundred years. Secondly, though it was Summer, they were not dressed in woolen clothes but in caribou-skin. Still more astounding was the fact that I was addressed by one of the men in perfect English.

"That afternoon a barren ground gale set in and continued for four days. I made camp near the Indians in a thicket of small spruce. It was very cold, much snow fell, and partly because I wished to learn something about the strange band, partly, perhaps, because misery loves company, I spent much time with them.

"I learned little directly, due to a secretiveness and even slight show of unfriendliness on the part of all the Indians with the exception of the one who spoke English. He talked freely, but at the end of a long day I could not find one leading fact in all he said. Observation, however, told me a great deal, and I surmised, and afterward found it to be true, that the members of the band, in which there were twelve hunters, twenty women and about thirty children, never visited a trading-post.

"They trapped only enough fur to trade with other Indians for ammunition, kettles and knives, besides a little tobacco, and they lived entirely on the caribou and fish, as their ancestors had before the coming of the traders.

"No one has ever found evidences of an organization or governmental control among the Northern Indians. Nearly always there is a leader in a band, but he is a man who has risen in prominence entirely through his hunting ability. Others pay him a certain amount of respect and accompany him, usually, but it is only because they know they are less liable to starve in his company. Nothing else holds them to him. This band had such a leader, Ne-edja. As I learned afterward, he was an unusual hunter and was believed to have advance information as to the migrations of the caribou.

"Ne-edja was getting old, however, but the leadership still remained in him because his son, Sass-del-gai, or White Bear, showed promise of being even a greater hunter. Living, as the band did, wholly upon caribou, success in hunting meant their very existence, and when I first met the

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band Sass-del-gai was already beginning to supplant his father.

"The Indian who spoke English, and who said his name was George Mitchell, though he had every appearance of being a full-blood, was the medicine-man of the band, and as I learned afterward was in reality the leader. I said that instances of organization or governmental control among Northern Indians were unknown, but George Mitchell proved the exception possible. Working craftily through Sass-del-gai and Ne-edja, and by conjuring, at which he was a master hand, his word had in reality become law.

"I might as well tell here what I learned later about Mitchell. He was born north of Walmsley Lake and until he was five years old lived as any other Northern Indian. At that age, when at Fort Resolution, an English traveler was attracted by the boy's bright face and, in a moment of idle curiosity as an experiment, I imagine, offered to send him out to school. This was done, and George lived at a mission somewhere near Edmonton until he was more than twenty years old.

"He then struck off for himself and in that period must have acquired all the tricks and wickedness and cunning he possesses. How he drifted back to the land of his birth and his own people I never learned. I have always supposed that his trail was followed for some distance at least by the Mounted Police.

"In any event he joined Ne-edja's band and since that time has managed not only to live comfortably without excessive exertion but has so greatly influenced Ne-edja and the other hunters that he rules them absolutely.

"Real cleverness among Northern Indians is unknown, but George Mitchell has it. He lacks only a larger field to become notorious. He never issues an order or expresses an opinion openly. He works through different members of the band, principally Ne-edja, plays upon their fears and superstitions, insinuates, suggests, guides their thoughts, and always has his way.

"From all I learned of the band, each member was an ordinary Indian, hunting and trading with the company, no better and no worse than any others, until Mitchell's arrival. He demoralized them completely and, as I have seen with my own eyes, they have become nothing more or less than outlaws, thieving when they have the opportunity and once committing murder. Through all their crimes Mitchell's cleverness has guided them in such a way that I feel certain no word of their acts has reached either the traders or the authorities.

"The one case of murder of which I was a witness is an instance. The band met two Indians who were going to Lake Athabasca with a large catch of furs and Mitchell induced them to accompany him. One night they camped on an island and the next morning, through a ruse, the two strange Indians were marooned and left to starve to death. Their furs were enough, traded through Indians to the westward, to buy a large supply of ammunition and tobacco.

"After the second day of the storm when I first encountered the band Mitchell became more friendly. I had read him more accurately by that time but I was not afraid as I was certain he would not be foolish enough to molest a white man. Behind his friendliness, moreover, I could detect no ulterior motive, and when the storm blew itself out and the band went on up the river, I went with them.

"We came to a small lake, the one on which the two strange Indians were marooned the next year. Because of the weather I had not had an opportunity for some time to make an observation. That day, the sun being bright, I got out the sextant. Of course the Indians were curious and I saw Mitchell, with side remarks, adding to the mystery of what I was doing. Sass-del-gai was a brazen sort and just as I was about to complete the observation he thrust his head over the instrument.

"'Get out!' I yelled at him angrily, and, stepping to one side, I took another shot at the sun.

"I thought nothing more of the incident until the next day, when I prepared to leave for the westward, the Indians having decided to remain on the lake. I was first attracted by an excited group in front of Sass-del-gai's tent and on approaching found them pointing at his face and talking all at once. Sass-del-gai was as frightened an Indian as I have ever seen, and when I came near he retreated before me in greater terror than before, but not so

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quickly but that I saw a small white spot on his forehead.

"I was anxious to get started and not particularly interested in the affair and turned to my canoe. Instantly the hunters lined up before it threateningly and made known the fact that I was not to leave. I had left my rifle in the canoe so I turned to Mitchell, who was sitting on a rock and apparently taking no interest in the matter.

"I asked him the trouble and told him to have the Indians get away from my canoe. He answered that he had no control over them. I asked what the trouble was and he said that I had conjured Sass-del-gai when I had taken the observation the day before and that the Indians had decided not to permit me to leave until I undid my work. Then he went on to accuse me of turning Sass-del-gai white.

"He pointed out the small white spot on his forehead and insisted, before the Indians, that in time he would be all white. Then, Mitchell said, Sass-del-gai would leave his people and go to live among white men and his band would be deprived of his leadership and hunting ability and would starve to death.

"Sass-del-gai looked as frightened at this as the other Indians. It was evident that he had no desire to leave his own people but he believed his own wishes would count for nothing against this powerful conjuring.

"I went over to the fellow and looked at the white spot again. It happens that twice before I have seen instances of this peculiar skin disease. It begins with one or more spots which spread until they cover the face and most of the body. No pain or irritation accompanies it. The skin simply turns white. So far as I have been able to learn, it is nothing more or less than a loss of pigmentation due to reasons for which I can not account. In the two previous cases referred to the victims thought little of it, except that they were secretly glad they were becoming white.

"Of course I did not give up without a struggle. It was then that I saw how fully Mitchell had developed his power over these people. He seemed even to have instilled in them a certain bravery, or perhaps it was desperation. In any event they believed implicitly that I had conjured Sass-del-gai and let me know that I would be kept with them until I put an end to the metamorphosis, and that, should he turn completely white, I would be killed instantly.

"That is nearly a year ago. Sass-del-gai's face is now half-white and the loss of pigmentation is spreading all over his body. According to the Indian belief, he thinks he is a doomed man.

"Several times I have made elaborate plans to escape but always I have been watched and always Mitchell has been my undoing. I did not suppose that Indians are capable of such concentration of effort and persistence of purpose, but back of it, of course, is Mitchell and his influence. I have tried intrigues with several members of the band, have done everything possible, once even got one hundred miles from the camp in Winter, but was caught and forced to return. As they do not wish to have me die before I restore Sass-del-gai to his natural color I am fairly well treated, and I always get as much to eat as the hunters.

"I am going to place this in a brass cylinder which I saved from my belongings and leave it in some place best suited for discovery by white men or by Indians who will take it to a trading-post. I not only want a record left of what has happened to me but I want the authorities to apprehend George Mitchell and liberate this band of otherwise harmless savages from his influence.

"JAMES WILSON DUNN."

CHAPTER VI

THE STRONGER TIE

"THERE'S only one small dark spot left," Tom repeated slowly when Marshall finished reading.

"Think of it!" cried Marshall. "To spend two years watching that fellow turn whiter all the time, to know that nothing he could do would stop it! And every day bringing the end nearer!"

"But we've come in time, and what we do to that naked devil will make him wish he had never heard the word conjuror."

"We've got to be in time!" declared Marshall. "Any day now may be the end."

"Which is probably why they skipped out tonight, that and the light on the water. Mitchell is afraid of us, like any crooked Indian is afraid of a white man. But that

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all don't sound reasonable to me yet. Indians may take orders from a medicine-man like that for a while but they never stick around long. And I don't believe they've got the nerve to kill Jimmie when they come right down to it. Such things don't happen. These nitchies have had the fear of the Almighty pounded into them in the last hundred years."

"I know," agreed Marshall, "and there never was an Indian that didn't admit that an Indian's medicine has no power over a white man and that they are helpless in the face of the white man's medicine. Why doesn't Jimmie conjure some more of them?"

"Sure. When an Indian thinks he's conjured he just naturally shrivels up and dies from plain fright. But all that was written more than a year ago. Why didn't he add to it if he didn't cache the cylinder? And why didn't he come off in the canoe himself? There is something funny in all this, lad."

Marshall, when he had been reading, had, after finishing each sheet, placed it beneath the others. As he and Tom talked he had been absently rearranging them.

"There is more!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I simply stopped when I came to his signature. Here's something he wrote just this Summer."

"I HAVE not cached the foregoing," he began, "because I knew I would be safe so long as Sass-del-gai did not turn entirely white, and always, of course, there has been the hope of escape. This last, however, after nearly two years with the Indians, has been abandoned. All last Winter I made no effort. In so far as I could I became a member of the band and seemed to be treated as such. In fact, because they feared something would happen to me before I would change my mind and conjure Sass-del-gai's skin back to its normal color, I was favored in many instances, especially when the band suffered from famine.

"Then in the Spring, when I thought they were no longer cautious, and after careful preparations, I slipped away during a blizzard. I estimated that we were within two hundred miles of Athabasca Lake and that I could reach it. I knew they could not follow me as the storm would wipe out my tracks, and I believed they would take it for granted that I would go west toward Great Slave Lake, which was nearer.

"Evidently Mitchell did not wait for the storm to blow out before he started the hunters after me. They were sent out in two parties, as I afterwards learned, one to the west and the other to the south. They did not try to track me but made big circles and cut my trail after the storm had stopped. In ten days I was back in camp.

"This Summer I tried twice again, for Sass-del-gai's skin was losing its pigmentation rapidly and I knew that his face would become entirely white before another Winter. But in Summer, when I can not be tracked, I am watched more carefully.

"I know that this account will be read first of all by men of the North country, if it is found, by men who know and understand the Indian character, and I know that, in view of the unusual situation, there will be doubts as to its truth. For that reason I am going more into the matter of George Mitchell's power over these people, the thing that would be held unaccountable. Moreover, in my second year I have had further opportunity to study the matter.

"Mitchell poses merely as the medicine-man of the band. I know that such Indians have developed some skill in sleight-of-hand but his surpasses anything I have ever heard of. I imagine that he brought back from the lower countries several tricks, some of which lead to the belief that he may have had some connection with the stage or a medicine show.

"First of all, he has convinced these people that, in his sojourn in the South, he acquired the secret of the white man's medicine and that he is in many respects even more powerful than a white medicine-man. His great variety of sleight-of-hand tricks has convinced them. He has said, however, that he fails only when a white man conjures through the sun, as I am supposed to have done when Sass-del-gai stepped between me and the sun while I was taking an observation. He has demonstrated this to them on many occasions by trying to conjure Sass-del-gai back to his true color.

"The reason for my being detained, for his having first told the Indians that I had conjured Sass-del-gai, is this. He probably

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had seen the white spot and had realized his helplessness in the face of Sass-del-gai's trouble, may even have seen the same disease before. He guessed rightly that he would lose his prestige with the band were he unable to cure the young leader. He was, however, able to turn the situation to his own advantage by accusing me and by being able to prevent me from conjuring any more of the band while I was detained among them.

"He spent six days, foodless and naked, in making the medicine which was to protect the Indians, who found it efficacious. Of course he does not expect that I can unconjure Sass-del-gai, but by keeping me here and keeping them inflamed against me, he has not only made them forget or overlook his own failure to cure Sass-del-gai of his malady, but he has strengthened his influence and has prevented my getting out alive and giving word of the existence of the band. I believe he planned from the first that I would be detained on some pretense or other.

"In telling the band that as a result of the conjuring Sass-del-gai would leave them and join the white men, Mitchell has shown his cleverness. It serves to keep alive their anger and fear. In time they might forget his white skin but they can not forget that their best hunter is to be taken from them. I could, by questions, easily establish the fact that Sass-del-gai does not want to leave. This would have no weight with them as they believe that the wishes or intentions of the individual can have no effect against the charm of conjuring.

"The great desire of the Indians for the cure of Sass-del-gai and their anger against me is based not on their superstitious fear but upon the very necessities of their existence. Their lives depend upon their having a good hunter, since they hunt their living instead of earning it by trapping. I do not know what first caused them to choose this life but I believe that Mitchell, who fears a loss in power and a less easy existence when subjected to the competition of other medicine-men, has largely influenced them to continue this life, if he did not instigate it in the first place.

"To do this he has convinced them that the police are seeking the band because of the murder of the two Indians from Lake Athabasca, and other crimes, that therefore they can never return to the white traders, and that their lives depend upon Sass-del-gai remaining an Indian and keeping them from starvation through his powers as a hunter. He has made them believe that they are outlaws and that they must stick together or perish. There is so much logic in this that it has not been difficult for him to exercise the unusual authority he has gained.

"This fear he has inspired in them has been developed to the point where I am perfectly satisfied the Indians will carry out their purpose. They believe themselves safe so long as they keep within this practically unknown district and away from trading-posts. Success in such a life depends upon their having a good hunter to lead them to the game.

"If Sass-del-gai becomes a white man they are helpless. They know this, are constantly reminded of it by Mitchell, and, because of their fear and their desperation in being unable to return to the white traders, they have worked themselves up to the stage where they will stop at nothing.

"It is for this reason that I have feared the appearance of a rescue-party this Summer, especially one which is too small to be a match for twelve well-armed, fear-maddened Indians. I can not doubt but that any rescue-party which might come would be too small for a successful battle with the band since there is no reason to suppose that my rescuers would imagine any situation which would require numbers. So I have come to the conclusion that, if a rescue-party encounters the Indians, I will keep in hiding, at least until I have assured myself that the party is sufficiently large to make a successful fight. I do not wish to place others in danger. The Indians would certainly resist any attempt to take me, and a pitched battle by a small party would leave all odds in favor of my captors.

"I think I have one real friend in the band. An old woman, whom I befriended the first year, has signified her desire to aid me several times, and on each of my last two attempts to escape she has made it possible for me to leave with some food and equipment.

"I will cache this record before Fall, as I know I will not live through another Winter. I am only sorry that I have no more paper or pencil so that I could write something of what I have learned of these Indians. No one except Samuel Hearne,

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I imagine, has had the opportunity to study them so intimately.

"I also want my friends to know that I am not complaining. I have spent twelve years in the North country and a man who selects such a life must expect to diminish his chances for a ripe old age enormously. This is a hazard of the game, I alone am responsible, and I only hope that the end comes before my friends come and attempt to rescue me. I do not want to be responsible for more deaths than my own.

"I wish, too, to take this opportunity to express to Marshall Wells and Tom Gill, my comrades on former expeditions, my undying esteem and affection. I wish also that all my property, of which I am enclosing a list, be divided equally between them.

"JAMES WILSON DUNN."

FOR a moment after Marshall had finished reading, the two squatted beside the little fire, silent, motionless. Marshall's voice, as he read the last paragraph, had become husky, and twice he faltered. Tom Gill's face was contorted by the conflicting emotions aroused. His jaws were clenched, and yet tears were running down his cheeks.

"—— Jimmie Dunn!" he finally exclaimed. "Doesn't he know we're not going to leave this country without him? Doesn't he know us better than that?"

"It's Jimmie all over," said Marshall huskily. "Remember that time his canoe upset in the rapids in that river south of Great Bear Lake and he got on to a rock. When he saw us putting out after him he jumped in rather than have us take the chance."

"He always was a pig-headed little fool," declared Tom, who still attempted to hide his emotions behind a fierce denunciation of his friend. "Anyhow, that old squaw explains the first note we got and the canoe being sent off to us. But why didn't he give us a chance?"

"He wouldn't, and he won't, and it's up to us to take it ourselves," declared Marshall. "We ought to be thankful that you opened that other sack of meat and found this record when you did. Now we can go at this with our eyes open."

"Let's be doing it then."

"There's no use before daylight, Tom. It isn't only that we need some sleep but we can't gain anything looking for their trail in the dark."

They brought their blankets and made a bed beside the fire. Tom agreed to be awake before dawn and immediately went to sleep. Marshall, though tired, lay beside him with his eyes wide open. He could not force from his mind the life his friend had led for two years, the fate that was held constantly before him. While he had been living comfortably in the Southland Jimmie had been undergoing constant torture.

This thought of his own life brought a vision of the mother and child he had left six months before. The kicking, gurgling, tight-fisted, bald-headed, unaccountably precious bit of humanity had continued to be something marvelous in Marshall's eyes, something supernatural in its sudden, wonderful, awesome entrance into his life.

The thought of the baby was with him always, but he tried to force from him all memory of its mother as he had last seen her, in that period of greatest loveliness that comes to a woman. Before his determination to go in search of Jimmie, and ever since, Marshall had been tortured by indecision as to the justice of his action. If he had questioned his right before when there were only the usual hazards of a Northern journey, what must be his decision now that he must face a situation which offered so little hope?

Try as he would to decide calmly, to weigh the two sides, there came always to his mind Jimmie's last note—"There is only one small dark spot left." He remembered Jimmie's face as he had seen it peering out from beneath the tent flap, recalled every word of his record and all that each tried so bravely to cover. When at last he dropped off to sleep he had reached a decision because he had deliberately chosen to do that which he wished to do.

CHAPTER VII

"ALL WHITE"

THE first light of dawn found Marshall and Tom in the canoe, each munching a piece of dried meat as he paddled. They had to break a thin shell of ice along the shore before they could embark, and their hands were numb as they grasped their blades.

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In their brief preparations they had discussed the situation and decided that they would first look at the small river that entered the bay in which they had landed the night before. A mile took them to the mouth of it and for another mile they paddled up the twisting stream. Then a falls necessitated a portage.

"That's good," commented Tom as he ran the bow up to the south bank. "We'll have a look. If they came this way they would leave tracks of some sort."

A few minutes satisfied them that the Indians had not left by that route and they turned down-stream to follow the north shore of the lake around to the river up which they had come.

"I think that will be where they left the lake," Marshall said. "It would be down-stream and give them the speed they require. In a short time, even with such a large party, they should reach the Thelew, and then they could turn up or down without leaving a trace."

"Which means we've got to get there as soon as they do," added Tom as he thrust the canoe ahead with a powerful tug at his paddle. "But we'll watch the north shore anyhow."

They followed it closely, though several deep bays and long points necessitated much paddling and it was nearly noon when they reached the east end of the lake and the river up which they had come from the Thelew.

Marshall reached out with his paddle and caught a rock as the current gripped the canoe. He turned and looked back at Tom.

"Might as well," answered the woodsman. "They surely left by canoe and we didn't see no tracks along the shore. There isn't any other river out of the lake and they must have gone this way. We can tell at the first portage."

They paddled all afternoon without seeing a trace of the Indians having passed. Rapids which had obstructed their progress on the way up were easily run, and they knew the Indians could have done as well. Not once was a portage necessary and as they sped on doubts began to assail them.

Their uncertainty was not due so much to their failure to find tracks. Reason told them they could not expect any until a portage was reached. But the urgency of their search, the fact that they must be certain before more time was lost, the absolute necessity of finding Jimmie Dunn before Sass-del-gai had turned completely white, drove them into a frenzy. They paddled more strongly than in the morning, dashed recklessly through rapids, searched the river banks constantly, but darkness caught them without a clue.

"Might as well go on," said Marshall. "Daylight won't help us until we strike a portage."

Tom kept the canoe in the middle of the stream.

The men were now savagely reckless. When the noise of rapids came to them they did not hestitate but rushed on through, taking their chances on rocks or falls. Once they struck so heavily the cedar planking of the canoe was crushed. But the canvas kept it from leaking and they continued. Again Marshall felt the bow leap out and then down over a small falls. They struck in a smother of freezing spray and a back-lashing roller half-filled the canoe. They struggled ashore nearly swamped.

All night they kept on, never stopping even to thank the fate that guided them safely through water they would have hesitated to run in daylight.

"Bet we passed more than one portage," commented Tom as they ran a particularly bad stretch of water just at dawn. "Anyhow, we'll catch them the sooner, if——"

As the morning wore on both men began to look ahead more eagerly for signs of a rapids or falls around which it would be necessary to portage. Until they found such a place, with its inevitable signs of the passage of so large a party, there was no means of knowing whether they were overtaking Jimmie Dunn or traveling away from him.

"Here we are!" shouted Marshall at last when they turned a bend and the thunder of a falls came to them. "I remember this place. Portage on the south bank. Good half-mile."

Before they landed they saw traces of the Indians having passed and, as the canoe touched, a dog, strayed from the band, ran out from behind a rock, only to retreat when he sniffed the strangers.

After crossing the portage they went on more swiftly than before, munching dried meat as they paddled, silent most of the time, curt when speech was necessary.

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Their anxiety as to the course of the Indians, now dispelled, was supplanted instantly by the greater fear, the increasing dread of their failure to overtake the band in time. The thought of Sass-del-gai's whitened face with its one small dark spot always growing smaller was constantly in each man's mind.

Once Marshall spoke of the possibility of ambush, of it being in accord with the plans of a man like George Mitchell, but he mentioned it as though it might have been a feature of the landscape, and the canoe sped on.

Sunset brought them to the mouth of the river after more than forty continuous hours at the paddles. Tom turned the canoe toward the sand point where the rivers joined but when Marshall attempted to rise from his knees he found that he could not.

"Wait!" commanded Tom, and he brought the canoe up broadside to the shore.

With much tugging and muttered curses they rolled the craft over and fell out, to lie moaning and rubbing their cramped legs. Ten minutes passed before they were able to rise to their feet.

"Now which way," said Tom. "Guess it's an even chance up or down. And we must be close. They only had twelve hours' start."

As he spoke the first flakes of a storm struck their faces. The woodsman looked up at the sky, felt the direction of the wind, and then muttered:

"It doesn't make any difference which way we go. This snow will hide all tracks of them."

"But it does make a difference!" replied Marshall fiercely. "It makes the difference of catching Jimmie in time or losing all trace of him."

"Well, if you could see canoe-tracks on that water, how could you tell which way they were headed?" demanded Tom, scornfully. "It's just an even break either way."

"Look here!" retorted Marshall, for the nerves of both men were shredded. "These Indians live on caribou. It's time for their Fall hunt, when they go out on to the barren grounds to meet the deer. And it's the most important hunt of the year for now is the only time when the skins make good clothing and tents. No matter what those Indians plan to do to Jimmie, or how much they want to throw us off, they've got to get to the caribou."

"And that means they go north here, down-stream," interrupted Tom.

"Certainly. There's wood along this river for quite a ways yet, and the barren grounds are east of here as well as north. They've got to have meat and they couldn't get through the Winter without nearly a thousand new skins. They had to go down-stream."

"Then you lie down in the canoe and take a snooze while I keep her in the middle," said Tom as he lifted their craft off the sand.

TWO hours later he landed and shook his companion.

"Get out, lad," he commanded. "We're foolish to keep on in this storm. Can't see a thing for snow and the dark and the wind blows across stream and I can't hear rapids ahead. We can't be running a strange river a night like this."

He had chosen a spot on the west shore where there was a thick growth of small spruce. In the center of it they cleared an opening, built a barrier against the snow and wind with poles and the tent, gathered wood and made their beds.

Little was said during the preparations, or while they sat waiting for the tea to boil. Marshall had a tin of condensed tea tablets in his bag, the only article of food the Indians had not stolen, and this was the first time they had been used.

"One bag of meat is gone already," said Tom as he felt of the skin sacks.

He spoke absently, as he might have mentioned a hole in a moccasin. Marshall did not comment. Both men knew food meant everything to them, but in the face of their greater problem, of the certainty of Jimmie Dunn's fate unless they reached him in time, they could not give consideration to anything else.

Even the next day, when they went on in the snow-storm, running rapids, portaging around falls, pressing on always with the idea that a wasted second was a crime, they gave scant heed to the inadequacy of their clothing in that season and that latitude.

At noon they reached the mouth of a river coming in from the east. Tom turned ashore.

"What do you think, lad?" he asked.

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"We should have caught them by this time unless they traveled night and day, too," was the thoughtful answer. "And this stream flows from the barren grounds. Perhaps if we go up until we strike a falls it would be wise."

The snow ceased falling as they started, the first thing in their favor in more than twenty-four hours. Soon they were past the timber, which persisted only along the larger stream, and out on the barren grounds. Two hours brought them to what they were looking for, a falls necessitating a portage. As they approached Marshall gave a shout of joy.

"They landed here this forenoon! See their tracks! No more than three inches of snow on them!"

"And they cached their canoes," added Tom as he pointed to a gully. "See them there, turned over and weighted down with rocks! Hurry out, lad! We can catch them before dark."

The trail was unmistakable and as easily followed as a highway. More than a foot of snow had fallen on the barren grounds, but the trail of sixty persons carrying and dragging on toboggans all their food and belongings was beaten deep and smooth. With their blankets, tent and little remaining dried meat on their backs, their rifles in their hands, Marshall and Tom hurried out into the desolate waste.

After the long days in the canoe walking was a welcome change, even if their legs were cramped and sore at the beginning. A bitter wind swept across the treeless plain, however, sending the snow swirling in clouds and stinging the men's skin in many places where it found entrance through their worn clothing.

Just before darkness came and as they were crossing a ridge somewhat higher than those behind them, Marshall caught sight of a large, dark blur far ahead.

"Bunch of brush!" he cried. "They'll be camping there."

"They are," added Tom as he looked. "See that smoke?"

They did not hurry now for they wished to have the protection of darkness before they approached the Indian camp. By keeping to depressions between the low hills they were able to get within a mile of it soon after sunset.

As they sat down in the shelter of a ridge they did not discuss plans for their entrance or what they would do when they arrived. After what they had endured since leaving the lake where they had first seen the Indians, with the uncertainty of whether Jimmie's fate had already overtaken him, they were simply possessed of a savage determination, of a fierce desire to find opposition and overcome it.

But an hour later when they strode suddenly and swiftly into the camp they were met only by women and children. Not a man was in sight, except two withered veterans of a lifetime's struggle with the barren grounds.

"Watch out for a surprise," whispered Tom as he glanced uneasily around.

"No!" cried Marshall. "They're gone! The men have gone on the hunt, leaving the women here or to follow. And out there somewhere, without leaving a trace, they will kill him when that last spot is gone."

In a frenzy of fear and desperation he turned and charged at the group of women who had gathered. He shouted questions, grasped one squaw by the shoulder and shook her, but the women only retreated before him, some laughing, some shrieking imprecations he did not understand.

"Look here," said Tom when Marshall returned to his side. "We can get some clothes. They've started work on their Winter outfits because I saw some back at their first camp. Stand aside and keep them off while I go into this tent."

He ducked in under the flap and soon returned with a capote and leggings of caribou skin tanned with the hair on and a handful of moccasins and some mittens. He handed them to Marshall and went into another tent. The women, seeing what he had done, charged in a compact group. Marshall yelled and pointed his rifle, but it was not until he grasped the barrel and swung his weapon about his head as a club that they retreated.

Tom came out of the second teepee with another suit, more moccasins, a half-completed skin tent and two pairs of snowshoes.

"This piece of tent will be enough for us," he said as he began to roll his booty into a pack. "But I couldn't find a bit of grub in either place, and there aren't any drying-racks."

"They usually leave the women and children to get along the best way they

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can," said Marshall as he drove off another rush of the squaws. "Probably a lake nearby where they can fish. Let's get out, Tom, before they start some one off on the hunters' trail and warn them we're coming."

They went on north through the brush, followed by a shrieking mob of women who brandished knives and clubs. When they passed the last of the brush the squaws began to drop back, but several kept on, jabbering shrilly and screaming in their rage. One old woman, bent with toil and age, was ahead of all the others. She ran on long after the rest had started back, shrieking for all the world like a dog snapping at the men's heels.

"Get out!" commanded Tom irritably as he turned upon her.

She defied them, jabbering and shrieking, and then suddenly Marshall sprang toward her.

"East—big lake—five days—hurry—run fast," were the words he had caught in Chippewayan.

The remainder of the old woman's remarks were unintelligible. Haltingly, choosing his words with difficulty, he asked her if Jimmie were still alive.

"Hurry, hurry," she repeated. "Run fast."

Then she pointed to one cheek and, covering half of one finger-nail, held it out toward him.

Marshall whirled, grasped Tom by the shoulder and started on.

"There's a chance!" he cried. "A chance!"

Tom, who had heard what the woman said and recognized her as the one Jimmie had mentioned in his record, did not need urging. In the darkness, straight out over the great white expanse, they hurried on, feeling with their feet the well-packed trail of the hunters, who had preceded them only that afternoon.

FOR a time they had no difficulty in following the trail. But the wind increased as the night wore on, driving snow before it in clouds. Gradually the path left by the hunters and their toboggans was filled until at last they could no longer feel it with their feet. Still they pressed on, keeping their left shoulders to the northwest gale, climbing ridges, stumbling over snow-covered boulders.

At midnight they came to a small, ice-covered stream in a depression and found a fringe of willows along its edge. In this meager shelter they halted, slipped on their new clothing over the old, rolled in their blankets, pulled the skin tent over all and went to sleep, the snow piling behind and on top.

At daylight Tom was awake. Snow was falling again as well as blowing and they cut thongs from the edge of the skin tent, fastening the snow-shoes on and then, each chewing a small piece of dried meat, started on toward the east.

Storm followed storm, gale followed gale, and for a week they went on, wandering over the limitless waste, searching, searching, always hoping. The last three days they were without food. They did not even have the comfort of a cup of tea, for there was nothing with which to make a fire. Each day they pressed forward, hurrying through the depressions, lingering on the crests of the ridges to sweep the land in every direction. Yet in all that time they did not find a track, see a living object or catch a glimpse of a telltale column of smoke from a moss signal-fire.

They retained a sense of direction but nothing more. They lost track of time and distance. They did not know whether they had gone five days in the right direction or more or less. When darkness came they pulled their blankets and the skin tent over them. When morning came they went on. There was only one thought, one desire—to find Jimmie Dunn before it was too late.

In the first days after leaving the Indian women Marshall had been torn by the doubts which had assailed him the night they had read the record. Had he the right to go on to certain death, as both men now believed they were doing? What of the two who were waiting for him down in the pleasant Southland? Should his duty to his friend come before his obligation to them?

But again, as on that night of his decision, he seemed unable to settle the question calmly, even to justify his action. Always the face of Jimmie Dunn would come before him and savagely he would thrust his snow-shoes forward. As the semi-delirium of hunger and exhaustion seized him he began to mutter Jimmie's name over and over as he walked. He became obsessed with the one idea—find Jimmie before it is too late. Nothing else

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seemed to matter. In time he did not know or remember anything else. Blindly, frenziedly, in the white, burning fever of desperate, dogged determination, he went on.

In the forenoon of the eighth day on the barren grounds they climbed a ridge to see an immense herd of caribou on the other side.

"Meat!" whispered Tom insanely as he cocked his rifle. "Meat! Meat! Meat!"

The sight of the animals had brought Marshall back to sanity, and with reason came caution. He jerked the woodsman's weapon from him and sprang away.

"Don't!" he commanded sternly. "Are you going to spoil it all after what we've gone through? This is the herd the Indians are seeking. If we shoot they may hear us and that's the end."

Tom rushed at him and attempted to seize the rifle.

"Meat!" he whispered. "Meat! Meat!"

"Tom!" cried Marshall. "Tom! Keep your head!"

The woodsman made another savage lunge for his weapon and then halted and whirled toward the north. A rifle had cracked beyond the second ridge.

"They're there!" cried Marshall. "Get back down the hill."

He turned and ran below the crest. As he stopped there came another shot, then several more.

"Give me my gun!" commanded Tom as he joined his companion.

There was another light in his eyes now and Marshall handed it over at once. Together they started down the slope, along the depression and around the end of a ridge that would take them with adequate cover to the place where the shooting had been heard.

Firing continued. Twice they saw scattered bands speeding away from where the main herd had been. They gave them scant heed but pressed on until, crawling in the snow, they came out on top of a ridge and looked down.

A single Indian was working frantically at the carcass of one of a dozen caribou that lay scattered over the trampled surface of the snow. He pulled out the intestines, and, stripping the fat from them, crammed it into his mouth.

"Come on," whispered Marshall. "He's left his rifle over there."

He started on a run down the slope, Tom at his heels. The Indian heard them, started up, and then stood motionless when Marshall threw up his rifle. More slowly the two white men approached, their weapons ready.

"It's that Sass-del-gai!" cried Tom suddenly.

They ran forward, caution forgotten, with only one thought. They reached the Indian and stared into his face. It was entirely white.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR LITTLE JIMMIE

"TOO late!" whispered Marshall.

His entire body sagged, seemed to grow smaller, and for the first time in months the tension relaxed. The weight of hardship and starvation suddenly augmented by that of despair and failure completely crushed him in body and spirit.

"We're not too late to get that Mitchell devil!" growled Tom. "We're not too late to square things."

He thrust his face forward until it was only a foot from the Indian's.

"And I'm going to begin now!" he cried in English.

Sass-del-gai, held motionless by terror ever since their sudden appearance, retreated before the deadly fury of the woodsman. His face, ordinarily gray with an underlying cast of pink, was ghastly as the blood flowed from beneath the skin. In places it was mottled, as if scabs had recently come off.

A small spot on one cheek alone retained a red tint, as if new skin were just forming. Marshall Wells, oblivious of Tom's threats and actions, had not looked away from the Indian's face. Now, as if it had suddenly blazed out like a star in a black sky, he seemed to see the spot for the first time.

"Get back!" he commanded, and he shoved Tom away and bent forward to examine the man's face more closely.

"Wait, Tom!" he cried after an instant's close scrutiny. "Maybe there's a chance! Don't you see? This man is alone. He may be lost, or have been absent from the others for several days. Perhaps——"

He stopped suddenly, hesitated because of his unfamiliarity with the language and then began to shout words at the Indian.

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"White man?" he demanded in Chippewayan. "Dead? Where? Where is the band?"

Sass-del-gai, still gripped by his terror, only stared.

"Let me at him," said Tom.

With a few Chippewayan words that may have been mispronounced or not exactly expressing his meaning, but with gestures and signs and a countenance that were unmistakable, he let the Indian know that he would die instantly if he did not agree to lead them to the camp of the hunters.

Still Sass-del-gai only stared in terror. Tom cocked his rifle and sprang back so that he could raise it.

"Speak!" he cried in Chippewayan. "Speak or die!"

"Don't shoot!" commanded Marshall.

"Leave this to me," was the response. "I'm going to scare him into telling if he don't die of fright before he can talk."

He raised the rifle until the muzzle was only a few inches from the Indian's face. The man's eyes were glazed with fear. Then, as if wrenching himself free from an adversary's grip, he twisted his neck and sprang to one side. He lifted one arm and pointed to where the caribou herd, stretching over the hills and filling the depressions to the westward, could still be seen.

"*Yannal*" he cried. "*Yannal Edzunkuthe!*"

"What's he say?" demanded Tom. "I got the first. He meant on the other side of the herd."

"The other means not far or very far, I've forgotten which," said Marshall. "Now we'll make him understand he's got to take us there."

At last, with threats, scowls, clenched fists, leveled rifles and the utmost of their Chippewayan, they forced upon Sass-del-gai an understanding that he was to lead them to the hunters' camp. They tried again to learn definitely whether Jimmie Dunn were still alive, but the Indian could not, or would not, understand what they meant.

"Anyhow," said Tom Gill at last, "we'll make him take us there and we can see for ourselves. How about some meat? This fellow must be as near starved as we are from the way he went after that fat."

"We can get some of it," agreed Marshall. "Set the Indian to work and watch him and I'll go after some of the other deer."

While the Indian resumed his task of stripping fat from the intestines of the carcass he had been working upon when discovered, Marshall ripped the hide from another animal, laying bare a mantle of tallow along the backbone and on either side. He tore this off in great sheets and went on to the next body. He had filled both their skin sacks before he returned, and, like Tom and the Indian, was chewing and sucking at the suet.

"Lord, lad!" cried the woodsman. "If we only had a fire!"

He looked longingly at the haunches of red meat and then turned his back upon it.

"Let's be mooching."

Each with a pack and Tom carrying the Indian's rifle, they started toward the caribou. The herd scattered before them and they passed on through, each man chewing a piece of fat as he walked. Marshall and Tom had gone for days without food when on the barren grounds before and they knew the torture caused by suddenly starting under full load the operation of a digestive system which had been idle for several days. Despite their hunger they took small bites and chewed for a long time before swallowing. After each had eaten about two pounds he resolutely refrained from taking more.

Sass-del-gai viewed the matter in a different light, however. Living in a land where food is practically the only consideration, where starvation dogs at a man's heels from birth until death, one of a people who know only feast or famine, never a continuous sufficiency, he ate as he walked, swallowed with every step and paused often to take a fresh supply of fat from his pack.

He did not let his gorging interfere with his speed, however, but for hour after hour kept swinging his snow-shoes straight westward across the white desert. Marshall and Tom, strengthened by the warm fat, were glad of the pace. They kept close at the Indian's heels, watching him and always looking ahead and to the side for signs of the hunters' camp.

After he had seen the red spot on Sass-del-gai's cheek, Marshall did not refer again to the possibility of finding Jimmie Dunn alive. Neither man spoke of his friend, in any way voiced his hopes or fears. There was a chance, they knew, that Sass-del-gai had been absent from the camp for several days, that the last brown spot had

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disappeared in that time. They knew he was the best of the hunters, the one upon whom the others relied to lead them to the caribou. Even then they might be waiting for him.

Neither did they speak of plans for Jimmie's rescue should they arrive in time. They knew that the Indians invariably made camp on the crest of a ridge so that the caribou herds could be sighted quickly. They knew they could not approach in the daytime without being seen, and that they could not get near at night without having the dogs give warning. They knew, too, that out there on the barren grounds, with storms ready to cover all tracks and prevent the approach of any one until Spring, the Indians, in addition to their fear-given courage, would be strengthened by the knowledge that any crime would be untraceable.

It was rather a simple, hopeful, dogged, blind devotion to one object that sent them on, undaunted by the odds against them, unmindful of anything except the rescue Jimmie Dunn. It was not so much the courage of brave men as the heedlessness of single-purposed hearts that had endured so much there could be no new terrors for them. They did not consider that they alone of their race were hundreds of miles beyond the farthest sentry of civilization, that they were to meet superstition-crazed savages in the center of the most desolate land in the world. They knew only that they had come for Jimmie Dunn and that there could be no turning back.

JUST at sunset they crossed a ridge higher than those they had passed. Before them the white expanse spread out like a vast plain.

"Lake," commented Tom as they started down the slope. "Guess he's going to cross it."

Marshall had stopped for a search of the landscape.

"What's that?" he asked suddenly, pointing toward the south. "It's a man. Another hunter going back to their camp."

Sass-del-gai also had seen the pin-point of black far down the shore, but he gave it only a glance and then turned toward the northwest.

"And there's the camp!" exclaimed Tom, pointing in the direction the Indian had taken.

It was only a larger spot against the everlasting white, or a collection of spots that blended at that distance.

"Here!" called Marshall suddenly. "Turn him back, Tom! Quick! Behind the ridge!"

The woodsman grasped the Indian's shoulder and whirled him around.

"Git!" he commanded, his gestures unmistakable.

Marshall had been jolted from the blind pursuit of their object by the sight of it. Instantly his mind had become active, and he eagerly explained his plan to Tom.

"This Indian is away from camp. So is the other one down the lake there. Two at least are absent. We are dressed in their clothing, wear their snow-shoes. That man down the lake is too far away to be seen from the camp. It will be almost dark when we reach it. We'll simply walk in and they'll never know, until we are among them, but that we are Sass-del-gai and that other one."

Tom took off his pack at once and began to cut a long thong from the skin tent.

"Of course we'll have to tie him up here," continued Marshall, recognizing the object of the rope.

He hesitated a moment and then added:

"Can't help it. Nothing can stand in our way now. If we can we'll come back this way and release him."

The Indian saw their plan and started to run. Marshall thrust his rifle barrel between his legs, tripping him, and was upon his back in a second. Tom bound the man's hands and feet and then wrapped the tent about him.

"It's not cold enough to bother him much," he said as he arose, adjusted his pack and started after Marshall.

Clouds had been driving across the sky all day and when the men reached the center of a deep bay of the lake snow began to fall. They went on faster, rejoicing that the storm made certain that those in the camp could not see the other Indian coming up from the south.

Just before dark, and while they could still see a couple of hundred yards through the snow, the tents loomed out of the gray haze before them. They watched them anxiously, not only hoping to catch a glimpse of Jimmie Dunn but because three men were at work outside.

One of these Indians saw them. They

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heard him call out, and in a moment men were tumbling out of the low shelters.

"It's all off," whispered Marshall.

"Wait," cautioned Tom as he keep steadily on. "They may still think we're Sass-del-gai and the other coming back. They're probably all starved and waiting for him to bring news of the deer."

Marshall had faltered only because he feared disaster to their plans, not because of fear for himself. Rather, the sight of the Indians had brought back that blind rage which had been growing since he had read Jimmie's record. But against the ten men gathered in a group on top of the low ridge before him he did not see how they could win.

"Remember," Tom whispered as they kept on, side by side, "that Mitchell devil is mine. And I'm not going to waste a shell on him either."

"Can you see Jimmie?" asked Marshall, who had been scanning the blurred group through the snow.

"Can't tell, but I don't think he's there. Keep your head down now. They may see our beards."

The hill had become steeper, the snow was slippery, their packs bulged large, and they bent to the climb. Steadily keeping on, not daring to look ahead for fear their hair-darkened faces would show, ignorant of what the group in front of the tents was doing, expecting every instant that rifles would begin to crack, they climbed the rise.

The hill seemed interminable, the suspense was becoming unbearable, when their feet struck trampled snow and they knew they were close.

"Now!" whispered Tom.

He stopped, slipped his feet from the snow-shoe thongs, twisted his shoulders so that his pack dropped behind him, and then with a yell of "Jimmie! Jimmie Dunn!" rushed straight toward the tents.

Marshall did not start so quickly but soon overtook him. As he ran he saw the Indians, unarmed, still in a group, scatter before them. Some turned and fled down the other side of the ridge. The others dived headlong into the tents. All were shrieking and jabbering.

Tom Gill sprang toward the nearest tent just as the last of the Indians was about to stoop before the entrance. The woodsman struck him with his entire weight and sent him crashing through the side of the shelter, bringing it down upon the two who had already sought their weapons inside.

Marshall had dashed to the next tent, into which another man was crawling. He was too late to repeat Tom's strategy, but as he rushed past he grasped one edge of the skin covering and dragged it after him.

Before he could stop and turn, a rifle cracked and a bullet cut through the top of his capote hood. He whirled to see George Mitchell, standing between the bare poles of the tent, ready to fire again.

The Indian never pulled the trigger. With a roar Tom sprang from behind, his rifle high above his head. He brought the butt crashing down through the medicine-man's skull. At the same instant an Indian, who had crawled from the wreck of the first tent, rose to one knee and aimed at the woodsman's back.

Marshall's rifle was on its way to his shoulder when he first saw Mitchell and now he swung the muzzle a few inches and pulled the trigger. The Indian tumbled forward on to his face in the snow.

Another hunter rose with his weapon from the tent in which George Mitchell had fallen, to be crushed down by a blow from Tom's rifle barrel. A second crawled from the tent Tom had demolished but only to drop his rifle and flee down the ridge. Still another attempted to squirm from between Tom's legs. The woodsman kicked him in the shin so viciously the man's head snapped back and he rolled over and lay motionless.

"Jimmie!" cried Marshall frantically as he looked around the campsite. "Where's Jimmie, Tom?"

"Don't know. Watch out, lad. There's some one else under that tent I caved in. Keep your eye on him and I'll have a look at this third wigwam over here."

He strode across to the last of the tents, one into which none of the Indians had run and from which there had come no sign of life. Marshall, stepping over the body of the man he had shot, held his rifle in his right hand while with the other he tugged at the tent under which he had seen a movement.

"This one's empty!" called Tom from behind.

Marshall pulled harder, for the body of the dead Indian lay on the skin. A second

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jerk and it was free, and he found himself looking down into the open eyes of Jimmie Dunn.

"Jimmie!" he shrieked. "Jimmie! You—you—you old son of a gun!"

He pulled the tent clear and found that his friend's hands and feet were bound. A knife, dropped by an Indian in the excitement of the attack, gleamed beside him, and in an instant Marshall had cut the thongs.

He jerked Jimmie to his feet by grasping the hood of his capote and then nearly knocked him down again as he thumped his chest and shoulders with heavy blows of his clenched fists.

Tom Gill rushed up and pulled Jimmie around to face him.

"You homely, good-for-nothing, trap-robbing hunk of perversity!" he whispered huskily. "Turn around!"

Jimmie Dunn, laughing, the tears streaming down his face, did as he was bid, only to be sent sprawling into the snow by a heavy kick from one of Tom's moccasined feet.

"Now that I'm square with you," said the woodsman calmly, "Let's get busy. We need a tent and sleeping-robes and a toboggan or two. We want to get out before those fellows come back at us. Mitchell is the only one I wanted a crack at and there's no use in killing any more. I only tapped that last one and he'll come to."

All three sprang to the task and in fifteen minutes they were lashed up and ready to leave.

Jimmie Dunn, after the shock of his release, was light-headed in his speech and completely useless in the preparations. As they were about to turn away from the camp of the people with whom he had spent two years he became rational for the first time.

"Here!" he cried. "We can't go off and leave these fellows with their rifles and ammunition. They'll be after us to-morrow."

"Leave that to me," said Tom gruffly as he slipped the traces of a toboggan over his shoulder.

He started down the ridge, the others at his heels, and the woodsman set such a pace, despite his load, Jimmie and Marshall had no time or breath for the thousand things they wished to ask. Tom led them across the lake and up the ridge beyond. After tramping about for a time in the darkness he found what he sought. He bent down and in a few moments Sass-del-gais was rising to his feet.

"See here, Jimmie," Tom began. "This nitchie is all white now, his face anyhow. If he'd been in camp you wouldn't have been living. But that wouldn't have been his fault, nor has it been that you came so near being wolf meat. Mitchell's the only one that was to blame and he's settled.

"So you just tell this fellow that Mitchell was a bad medicine-man and you would have conjured him back to his natural color long ago if Mitchell hadn't kept making stronger medicine. Tell him his soul is red if his face has turned white and that you've conjured his skin to be red again, only it will be five or six years before it turns. That'll set his mind easy and by five years he'll forget about the rest of it."

Jimmie spoke to Sass-del-gai at some length in Chippewayan. At last, his face contorted by joy, the Indian set off for his camp.

"You see," said Tom, "there's a mess of women and children back at the edge of the barren grounds waiting for these men. It was justice killing Mitchell and anybody else that was in our way, but it would be murder to go further and to take away their rifles. The thing for us to do is to start now and mooch. They can never catch us or track us in this storm."

TAKING turns at the two toboggans, munching on the frozen fat, they kept on toward the south all night. The snow continued to fall and the wind wiped out all traces of their path an hour after they had passed, but they kept on all day without a stop. Traveling in the trail of the leader and with the toboggans between them, there was no opportunity to talk. They saved that for the timber, a fire and a warm meal.

It came the third night, and with it the caribou. They killed and killed, and for a day they sat and smoked and ate. Then, all immediate danger past, warm, their stomachs full, with plenty of meat for the present and Lake Athabasca less than four hundred miles to the south, their minds were freed from the bondage of dread.

"Look here, Marsh," said Jimmie as he smoked his first pipe in more than two

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years. "We've got a lot of ammunition, toboggans, a tent, moccasins and good clothing, and we're up here sixty-three degrees north. Less than two hundred miles from here, to the east, there's a queer bit of climate, or a small area of soil, or a protecting range of high hills, something which has given the timber a chance to get quite respectable. Right out there in the center of the barren grounds, several hundred miles north of timber line, there's this oasis, with rabbits and ptarmigan and Wintering caribou.

"Living in it are several families of Indians, people who, in this generation and the last, at least, have never seen white people. They're Indians, but they've developed peculiar customs because of their economic situation. Did you ever hear of an Indian laying anything by for a rainy day? Well, these people do. They are as careful as an Eskimo, and as long-sighted. Why—" and Jimmie, the explorer's enthusiasm aroused, went on with a long description of the strange band.

But when he ended there was no comment. Tom and Marshall only smoked and looked at the fire.

"Those Indians I was with heard of them, ran across one of them," he continued. "This Winter they planned on visiting the place. With Mitchell that meant only one thing, of course. Now they won't go. Think of it! A band of Indians who have never seen whites, who have lived alone in that oasis in this worst of the world's deserts! Don't you see? We've been working for twelve years now. The geology fellows have hit most of the places we've missed. The map's filling up. It's the last thing to discover on this continent, the very last, and only we have an inkling of it."

He looked eagerly at the others but they did not respond or look up.

"Don't you see?" he repeated. "We can take what we have here for an outfit, strike east, find this place, spend a month there, and still be back at Fort Chippewayan before the ice goes out. We have the start. Why not take it? It means only four or five hundred miles additional. We'll stab the last blank space, find the last band of savages, and it will be glory enough with which to quit for good."

Tom and Marshall continued to stare into the flames.

"What's the matter, Marsh?" demanded Jimmie, his face alight with enthusiasm, his eyes shining with the discoverer's fire. "Come on. Don't you want to go?"

"No, Jimmie," answered Marshall quietly, "I don't. And I won't. I'm going straight south, understand, and south and south, and south. I'm going home, home. And I'm going to take that youngster, that little Jimmie, in my lap and never put him down. I—I—I'm through with the North country, through for good."

Jimmie Dunn stared at his friend for a long minute.

"Marsh," he finally whispered huskily as he reached out and laid a hand on his friend's knee. "Marsh! Is there really a little fellow down there? And did you say his name is Jimmie?"

"Jimmie, James Dunn Wells."

"Marsh! After—after what I— Marsh! Marsh! I'm going back with you. I'm going to see him, this little Jimmie. And Marsh, we'll make an explorer of him, won't we, a real one?"

The two friends' hands met and gripped.

"Huh!" snorted Tom Gill from across the fire. "You always were a pig-headed little fool, Jimmie. What will there be for him to explore when he grows up?"

"Tom, you're dense as ever!" cried Jimmie. "Don't you see? Marsh and I are going to save this last discovery for him."

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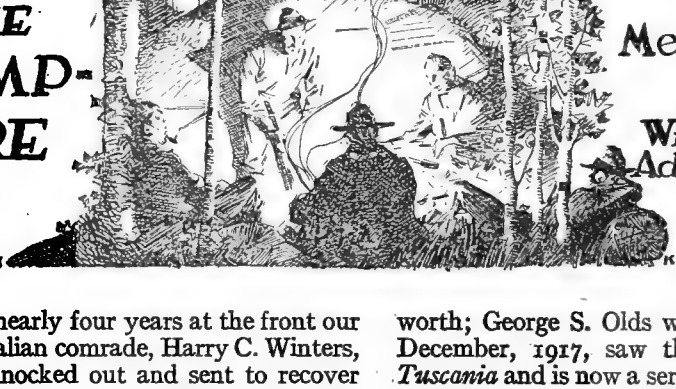
THE CAMP-FIRE



A Meeting-Place for Readers Writers and Adventurers

AFTER nearly four years at the front our Australian comrade, Harry C. Winters, has been knocked out and sent to recover in England. Our good wishes to him. Here is his letter, written from hospital in April. As I answered his letters regularly, my replies must have fallen by the wayside.

My letters to you, having had no replies, have evidently met with bad luck, torpedoed. Old Fritz is very busy these times. You will note I am no longer in Northumberland Fusiliers. Got knocked out so badly that the powers that be have transferred me to this unit and I look like finishing my time in Blighty. Between you and I, I have had a fair over and it is about time I got a spell.

Glad you folks are in the joke now. Have seen some of the lads, they seem a fine type and should go far. They have already had a taste of it so can form some idea of the game we have been up against now for nearly four years. I know they'll make good and their aid just now is very welcome.

Give my respects to the Camp-Fire and with all the best for yourself, hoping we shall soon make finis to this racket.—Pvt. H. Winters.

AMHERST College men, please straighten us out on this. "Lord Jeffrey Amherst" is one of your most particular and famous songs. Was he the Jeffry Amherst of Hugh Pendexter's story in this issue? What connection had he with Amherst College?

Incidentally, the man who wrote the words and music of that song, James S. Hamilton, was for a time on the staff of *Adventure* and his is one of the five little service flags that hang in our room. I went down to the boat that carried him to ambulance work in France, May 14, 1917, and he has been doing his bit over there ever since.

OUR other service flags are for Harry E. Wade, at this writing in training-camp and probably destined for the 22d Regulars, the aviation section of its infantry brigade; E. C. Clayton, who, like Mr. Wade, left us in May, and is now at Ft. Leavenworth; George S. Olds who went across in December, 1917, saw the sinking of the *Tuscania* and is now a sergeant in the Medical Supplies Department; Theodore N. Pockman, who recently joined the Marines. All the rest who are or at various times have been on *Adventure's* staff are over age (one under age), all married and most of them with children, except one of the present staff who is both under age and ineligible through a physical injury.

And now to Mr. Pendexter's two letters giving us more of the historical background to his story in this number:

Norway, Maine.

The only fictitious characters in this yarn are the trader and The Killer, and the latter's part was played by some messenger from the Three Fires.

SIR WILLIAM JOHNSON'S tremendous efforts to hold the Six Nations back from joining the allied tribes under Pontiac constituted one of the most valuable services any man ever contributed to the English provinces. That he succeeded, with the exception of the Senecas and a few Cayugas, should be his most lasting monument.

The figurative language of the Indians in making peace or allying for war contained much of a sameness; *viz.*, the expressions, "the whistling of evil birds," "hold fast the chain, etc.," being constantly used at various councils.

It is a historical fact that Etherington at Michilimackinac threatened to send as prisoner to Detroit the "next person who should disturb the fort with such tidings." This after a friendly Canadian had warned him the Indians were plotting to destroy all the English on the lakes. I could not resist citing a parallel case, Fort Mims massacre, 1813, when, "At the very moment of attack a negro was tied up, waiting to be flogged for reporting that he had the day before seen a number of painted warriors lurking a short distance outside the stockade."

SIR JEFFRY AMHERST not only wrote Colonel Bouquet that he "wished to hear of no prisoners being taken," but to the same officer he also suggested, "Could it not be contrived to send the Small Pox among those disaffected tribes of Indians? We must on this occasion use every stratagem in our power to reduce them." (Parkman's Conspiracy of Pontiac, Vol. 2, p. 39.) I think

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Amherst must have been a Hun. There seems to have been some sad scamps on both sides, but the blindness was largely in English eyes. A grim touch of humor is found in Sir Jeffry Anherst's letter to Gladwyn, besieged at Detroit, in which Gladwyn is ordered to *reestablish* and *hold* the forts at Michilimackinac, Sault Ste. Marie and Green Bay! and this at a time when the Detroit fort was holding on by the eyelashes.

WHAT impresses me deeply in my reading is the constancy of reports sent to Colonel Bouquet in Philadelphia, and Amherst in New York, from the most isolated posts. It has attracted my attention to a class of men never, to my knowledge, played up in fiction—the express-riders, who got through and got back no matter how closely a fort was besieged. Of course many were killed. History treats them anonymously, the official papers merely stating that "the following was received by—by an express." There must be a good story in them. God knows they got no promotion or glory. When it was impossible for a man to raise his head above a rampart, walk a rod from the post, etc., without losing his hair, these unrecorded express-riders were constantly carrying correspondence from Detroit to Fort Pitt, from all smaller posts, and *getting back* again.—PENDEXTER.

NORWAY, MAINE.

USUALLY an envoy was granted safe conduct, although there are instances recorded when their sacred office was not recognized. Besse's conductor, acting on the Indian impulse if not because of his respect for J.'s agent, an envoy with belts, acted correctly even from the savage's point of view in telling him to beat it. That his action should be overruled and he himself should take part in the pursuit is but another characteristic of the Indian's inconsistency. After he fled, the young brave's act of picking up the belt was accepted as being the act of the tribe. Perhaps the killer urged the capture of the fugitive. The Indian mind in such matters was as changeable as that of a child.

I'M UP a tree *in re* your Lord Geofry Amherst. I never thought of the college in writing the truth about Sir Jeffry. In fact, I have nothing at hand to show that your man founded Amherst. T. P. Field (United States Bureau of Education, quoted in Larned's History Ready Reference) says Amherst Academy was incorporated in the town of that name in 1816. Two years later the trustees voted to raise a fund of $50,000. "This charity may be said to be the basis of Amherst College. . . . This for many years was the only permanent fund of Amherst College, and without this it would have seemed impossible at one time to preserve the very existence of the college. So Amherst College grew out of Amherst Academy." He continues to say it was not till 1820 that buildings for the college were erected. In the opening of his article he says "Amherst College originated in a strong desire on the part of the people of Massachusetts to have a college near the central part of the State. . . . .The ministers of Franklin county, at a meeting held in Shelburne, etc." Nothing about Lord Geofry so far. . . . Parkman, in his preface to the sixth edition of "Conspiracy of Pontiac," makes a point of "the proposal of the Commander-in-Chief to infect the hostile tribes with smallpox."—PENDEXTER.

YOU will remember how Captain Moorhead, having read Samuel Alexander White's novelette, "The Wave Bound," told us how he himself had been wrecked on the Magdalen Islands. Now comes further information on these interesting islands from another comrade:

Bass River, Mass.

I have been much interested in the letter you published by Captain Moorhead about his adventure on the Magdalen Islands, as it has been my custom to spend about four months on Amherst Island every year.

LANDING as late as he did on the island, after such a severe experience, I can well understand how bleak the climate must have seemed to him, and it is a fact that the islands are a menace to navigation. Four large steamers went aground in the course of a couple of months last Summer, and many schooners are wrecked annually because of the shifting winds and hidden shoals.

But Captain Moorhead's impression of the Island's desolation is altogether misleading, and I am sure memory fails him when he states that he found only one man who spoke English in 1892. English is now well spoken pretty well throughout the group.

THE "old Judge" of whom he speaks must be Monsieur Brasset, formerly factor in the old days for the Coffin family who held the islands in feudal fee under a grant from George III, to Admiral Isaac Coffin of Nantucket for his loyalist services in the time of the American Revolution.

The islands are extremely fertile, though much of Amherst is treeless now. When Audubon visited the island a century ago, he found it well wooded. But it is now stripped, and the land is divided into many small but productive farm holdings. It is a curious fact that the islands are still held by the last vestige of feudalism in North America, and each landholder has to pay to the seigneury one shilling of tribute annually per acre.

There is an excellent inn now, as then in 1892, kept by the four venerable Shea Sisters, well known through the writings of many a novelist and traveler, and they continue the famous tradition of hospitality inaugurated by their mother over sixty years ago. Throughout the length and breadth of Eastern Canada their little hostelry is famed, and I am sorry that Captain Moorhead was not directed to it, as he would have found a warm Irish welcome there.

IT HAS been a secret meeting-place for many of us who are writers and artists for a number of years, and if a history of the islands is ever written, it will be a rich storehouse of legendary lore. I regard the islands as a mine of untouched material for those who write of adventure, and the history of strange and terrible happenings at Bird Rock Light alone during the past twenty years would be subject matter for many novels. You will be doing a service to the writing craft by dispelling the bleak impression left on Captain Moorhead's mind by his own hard experience, and suggesting the islands as a new field to wanderers in search of local color and strange experience—EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

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ANOTHER comrade of our writers' brigade has gone into khaki. After many attempts and after undergoing an operation to improve his physical condition, Dr. J. U. Giesy writes joyfully that at last he has been commissioned in the Medical Corps of the U. S. Army. Congratulations and good luck.

DURING 1918 I've been ill a good deal, but there wasn't supposed to be anything the matter with my brains. Just the same here are two mistakes I've made in "Camp-Fire." One is failing to get the following from H. A. Lamb into the issue that contained his story "Alamut."

CAMP WADSWORTH, SPARTANBURG.

Alamut existed, and its conquest by Hulagu Khan is history. Settlements of the Refik survived as late as 1700. I have taken the liberty of putting one in the ruins of Alamut, and giving it a good deal of political or rather predatory power. The organization of the Refik, under rule of the "Old Man of the Mountain," is historical. You have probably heard of the Refik as Ismailians. Marco Polo started me on the trail of the Old Man of the Mountain, and the trail led to a bit of hidden history that proved rather weird.—HAROLD A. LAMB.

THE second concerned the facts sent us by Robert and Kathrene Pinkerton concerning the "turning white" disease that figures in their story in this issue. I got mixed and put their letter in the number containing their former story, "The White Indians." The letter established the fact that there is such a disease and gave several authenticated instances.

IT IS seldom that an article creeps in among our fiction stories. The man who wrote the article in this issue has been dead over four years now—Harry Couzens. A good many of you remember him, were his friends, as I was. I have been going through some of his old letters for things that might interest you. The things are there, but somehow I do not feel like talking about them. Not, of course, that they are in any way to his discredit. His slate was clean and his adventurings were interesting. But, if you don't mind, I'll not even give the long letter he wrote concerning the foundation for the present article, except to quote one sentence: "Everything mentioned has appeared in print as news at some time or other and may be taken as straight stuff simply dressed up."

Toward the letter's end, too, he adds that he is not certain the *Norna* was sold under the hammer or that Weaver died in Samoa, though he had heard the first report from several people and the latter from one who was rather in position to know.

BEFORE the article was written—and I'm not quite sure myself why I've let it lie so long in the safe—before, I think, I even became acquainted with Couzens, I had heard of part of Weaver's exploits from a friend of mine whom we will call B. I know of few men who are more the man and more the gentleman than B. and I omit his name merely because his chance share in one of Weaver's cruises, though in no way discreditable to him, is his private affair.

My recollection of it is hazy enough. As I remember, B. was a passenger to Gibraltar on a ship that touched at the Azores when Weaver's yacht was there. On invitation from this strange character, who at the time seemed only the millionaire he purported to be, B., a priest and possibly one or two others left the steamer and joined Weaver in a cruise to the Canaries. Whether they remained with him on his cruise up the Adriatic coast of Italy I do not remember, but that bleeding of wealthy Italian villa owners through fear of a purely imaginary trolley line across their estates is the incident that stands out most clearly in my mind.

HE TOLD me the story of his cruise. I had never known him to lie or even to embroider and I think no one else has, either before or since. But it was a tall tale and I confess I wondered.

Well, B., who had had experiences worth lecturing about, decided to try his hand at that game in spare time. He was slated for a talk at some Catholic institution in Harlem. Being his first attempt, he was a bit nervous and asked me to go along as a straw of moral support. It was one of the coldest, windiest nights I've ever known New York to furnish and the transportation lines suffered; when one kind of conveyance broke down we walked till we found another. The coldest thing I ever did was to walk—and run, for we were late by this time—across some bridge over the Harlem.

But we finally arrived and the lecture went off well. Afterward the priests invited us to their own warm fire and right in the middle of the invitation one of them

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and B. suddenly recognized each other. It was the same priest who had taken the Weaver cruise with B. Certainly I heard much about Weaver that night and the tall tale became believable enough.

STILL farther back I had read in the newspapers of Weaver's famous plan to publish a magazine from his yacht as it cruised about the world, with Kipling and other famous writers as contributors. Doubtless many of you also remember the publicity the proposal received, and doubtless many of you will remember much more about the man than I do. A queer genius. I always wonder why people so gifted, so able to make their way legitimately, should prefer the almost-sure-to-lose-in-the-end games. There are so many other ways of getting excitement.

ANOTHER of our comrades of our writers' brigade has ceased to come to our Camp-Fires. William Hope Hodgson met his death on the Flanders front April 17, fighting for the same cause our own boys are fighting for. Our salute to him, and Godspeed over the Last Trail.

A brief letter from his wife brought me the news and an enclosure from an English paper. He had volunteered for the dangerous duty of observation officer of his brigade, set out at night with an infantry officer and a signaller, failed to return. It was found that all three had been killed by a shell.

Only a few days before his death he had written home of the fighting on April 10th. As stated in the English newspaper:

The enemy had broken through right up to the guns and when most infantry and artillery had retried, the commanding officer, Lieutenant Hodgson, another officer and a few N. C. O.'s fought a rear-guard action across three miles of country amid a hail of machine-gun and rifle fire, hotly pursued by the enemy. Lieut. Hodgson climbed to the roof of a wrecked farmhouse as F. O. O. under very heavy shell and rifle fire. All of that gallant little band got away safely, but with the loss of all their kit, even their Sam Browne belts and their revolvers.

I give here his last letter to me, written November 17, 1917. Though we had never met, we had been friends by letter for several years before the war. He had served almost from the beginning, leaving his little châlet on the French Riviera to join up; before that, "eight years at sea, three times round the world, ten years an author."

NOVEMBER 17, 1917.

Just a line to wish you good luck and . . . I'm dropping you this brief note from the front, as I thought you might be interested to have a word from what one might well call the "present heart of things." I may not, of course, tell you where I am, but I can give you an address which will find me: 2nd Lieut. W. H. Hodgson, 84th Battery, R. F. A., B. E. F., France. If ever you feel inclined to drop me a friendly word, as of yore, this address will always find me—that is, above ground!

. . . I've just come out of the firing-line for a few days' rest. It's been pretty hot work lately where I've been and one sees things, naturally, that are pretty dreadful; but I should imagine that on the Hun side of the line, things must be absolutely appalling (?spelling!!) Jove! if, I'm spared, and can write, I guess I'll have a few tales to write that will interest you, after this war is over. How are you all regarding the war over there? What do you all think about this Italian business?

LORD, man! You'd like to be out here to see and hear some of the sights and sounds of war. I've heard the machine-gun fire rise into an absolute scream of sound, by hundreds, a devilish torment of shrill, abominable noise, impossible to imagine in the mass. And then again, at other times, I've heard a lonely gun in some unseen field at night tap-tapping its disconsolate death-message across some stretch of darkness. Do you get it? I could go on for hours giving sights and sounds from a literary point of view but I might forget and say too much, and then this might not get past the censor. Drop me a line some time and tell me how you and the magazine progress. Meanwhile, as always, let me wish you all kind things.

Most sincerely yours,
WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON.

WHAT is patriotism? We are beginning to understand pretty clearly what it is in war time, but when we were at peace we heard very little—and thought very little—about it.

It doesn't seem possible that, when the war is over and peace comes again, we can think so little about it as we used to do. Maybe we'll begin to see that voting and keeping the laws isn't enough by way of service to the country, that patriotism means good citizenship and that it's our job to find out just what good citizenship is and then to practise it and teach it to others.

That is what the American League for Citizenship, Inc., is for. Probably by the time this reaches your eye the League will have begun active operations. And the kind of good citizenship it is devoted to building is good for war times as well as peace times. Are *you* a good citizen? *How* good? Do you want to be a better

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one? Do you want to make other Americans better citizens? Do you believe we can any longer trust to haphazard methods of teaching and imbuing good citizenship or should we unite in organized and efficient effort? The League will furnish the means.

BY WAY of comparison in the matter of running powers of Indians, here's the white man's record for one hundred miles straightaway:

Bloomington, Ill.

I have noticed with interest the discussion pro and con regarding the alleged speed of the Indians of the Southwest. I know little about Indians but I do know that the recognized world's record for 100 miles is 13 hours 26 minutes and 30 seconds, held by C. Rowell.

With this performance in mind I have little difficulty in crediting the Indian messengers with equal or greater speed.—F. W. P.

THAT query of Edgar Young's—"What is the spirit of adventure, particularly in its biological aspects?"—keeps bringing in interesting replies.

Winnipeg, Can.

The Spirit of Adventure is that inheritance of so many of us through long generations of ancestors back to the man-ape of Jack London, who first watched the log washed down by the river and wondered where it went, till at last he found one large enough to go voyaging into the unknown. To his descendants he handed down cells in brain and body which are responsible for the wanderlust, which makes us hear the call of the wild, the new, the strange. The man or woman with the Spirit of Adventure as part of his inheritance can find friends anywhere, and romance will meet them in the crowded street as much as, or now-a-days more then, in the desert solitudes. Without appearing to go out of their way, those who have it will travel whether they will or not. They are never so happy as when on the move, meeting new people and seeing fresh places.

THE brotherhood of those with the Spirit of Adventure will make itself heard anywhere. Family ties may and do harness it, but the call is always there. Fortunately Canada gives one lots of elbow-room. But I can go into a restaurant for a meal and pick up a stranger and have him tell me his life story before he realizes it, and then they say we old countrymen can't mix.

AS FOR the intellectual side of adventure, of course, it exists. It is in the blood of every born adventurer. There is no great author who is without it. Those who are happy (or the reverse) to possess it, study or at least play with all the sciences, and all the religious and philosophical beliefs. You have to start out with a proposition that "there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will." Secondly, that while God made man in His own image, man has ever since been trying to make God over in his, which accounts for all the mistakes in the churches. Thirdly, you have to accept the proposition that man can not create. For this reason man may distort truth, but he can not conceive anything that is not. Consequently there is some truth in all systems of theology. Truth is like a mountain top. The aspect may be different in every direction you look. If you persist in looking only one way, naturally some one who is looking in another direction is going to call you a liar because you deny what he can see.

ONCE you recognize that all the knowledge we possess—spiritual, material, or mental—consists merely of a few grains upon the sands of the ocean of the universe and of the sea of eternity it becomes evident how important all *thought* is. It opens up vast possibilities in physical science as well as in moral and mental planes of thought. It provides a key to all religions. It is yours to adventure thereon. No thought is too daring if you do not let it run away with you when half fledged. Nothing is impossible, because the human mind, being finite, could not conceive it if it were absolutely impossible.

So all the range of the past, the present and future, and all the ideas, wild and distorted as many of them are, that men have ever conceived, are there for the strong brain to go adventuring on. It is dangerous, of course. So is all adventuring. It is uncharted and unmapped territory. Most of those who adventure may be lost or suffer shipwreck and disaster. Many try to start new schools and proclaim they have found a wondrous new land, but later explorers find no traces of what they proclaim. That happened with the early adventurers in the time of Herodotus and those from whom he drew his alleged facts, and continued down till long after the Spaniards came to this continent. But the known area of the intellectual lands of adventure is smaller than the world as known to the earliest adventurers of mythology in our world.

TO ILLUSTRATE what I mean about the human mind being always on the right track when it conceives anything as possible we have only to remember how steam, wireless, flying-machines, and submarine craft were derided by scientists for centuries before they became commonplaces. It is difficult in a few words to define or explain anything so vast. I hope I have suggested what you want, however poorly.—RICHARD H. MCDONALD.

OUR comrade of the writers' brigade, Charles Brown, Jr., writes (during the second phase of the big German offensive) that his section of twenty ambulances has been attached to the "ace attacking division" of the French Army. Of this body of troops he says:

A division like this one never existed before. Practically every man had been decorated again and again. And now they have put a stop to the Hun advance in these red meadows.

DON'T forget to be listing your vote for the ten best stories in *Adventure* during 1918. If you like, add a list of another ten for honorable mention as you did for 1917 and 1916.

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FIGHTING THE HUN WEB

A department devoted to throwing light upon the actual workings of the subtle German propaganda in the United States, Canada and the other Allied countries. Every time you discover one of the strands of this web, tell the rest of us about it, briefly but clearly. Once seen, it loses its dangerous power.

EVERY minute of every day the German propaganda machine is working—on *us*. In thousands of ways in thousands of places. Its agents are everywhere. Some of them are conscious agents, directly or indirectly employed by the Prussian machine. But many others are *unconscious* agents of the Germans, working for the German cause without knowing they are doing so—good Americans who would be wild with rage if they knew they were working for the enemies of their country.

For one important part of the Hun propaganda system is the use of their enemies in spreading what the Huns want spread. A very few real Hun agents can stir up much trouble by hoodwinking their enemies into doing most of the stirring.

A MAIN point to keep in mind is this: The Prussian machine plans very far ahead. In 1871, if not before that, the Prussian machine began definite preparations for the present war. Not just the creating of a strong army and navy. Part of the preparation was the slow, systematic changing of the character of the whole German people, the inculcation, from childhood up, of the doctrine of iron and blood, so that when the time came the German people would be *psychologically* fitted to carry out the part assigned to them in advance. Did the machine succeed in doing this? We know it did; the German people of today are a different people from the Germans of forty years ago, trained from infancy to belief in might instead of right, soaked from childhood with belief that *Deutschland über Alles* excuses all moral crimes and makes them virtues, fed all their lives with the idea that they were put into the world for nothing but the attainment of Germany's brutal "destiny."

THE Prussian machine did just what it planned to do with the German people. It took over forty years to do it, but it was done and done thoroughly. But did the rest of the world know they were doing it? Did we recognize the little steps the Hun machine was taking day by day and year by year for over forty years? In all that time did the world even realize that the Hun machine was anything more than a builder of army and navy? Yet its army and navy would have been utterly inadequate to the machine's purpose if they had not been backed by a people carefully developed and shaped *psychologically* to become submerged but perfectly working cogs in the great Prussian machine.

You can't keep tabs on Germany by counting her ships and soldiers. What she is really doing is always something much more vital and far-reaching, much more subtle and underhanded, than making armies and navies.

NOR was the changing of the German people's character the only other thing she was doing during those forty years of preparation. Her diplomatic moves and intrigues, all aimed at the goal set forty years in advance, are fairly plain—now. We can even see, *now*, how she sent her colonists into Latin America, the United States and to many other parts of the world, too often keeping them bound,

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psychologically and often materially, to herself, no matter under what guise they came, no matter what oaths of allegiance they might swear. And we have seen how often all other forces in the world were unable to break the invisible threads that bound these colonists to the German machine and its purpose.

BUT Germany was doing still more during those forty years of preparation, something infinitely harder to detect. Just as she was educating and developing the German people to make them reliable cogs in her empire-building machine, just so was she educating and developing the people of the nations she aimed to crush, but educating them to be *un*reliable cogs when called on by her enemies.

And this is the part of her forty years' preparation we do not see clearly even yet. We get glimpses, however. Very illuminating glimpses. We begin to see how she has never failed to stir up trouble, on any kind of issue, between nations. We begin to see how she works within each nation to increase rifts between classes, parties, sections, creeds, to divide each nation against itself in every possible way to the greatest possible degree. We begin to see how, too wise to advocate her own interests openly and directly, she lends support and money and unseen impulse to other causes so that her own cause may gain in the end, a year, ten years, forty years ahead.

WE SEE her hand in our own labor and transportation difficulties, her insidious propaganda used in a diversity of ways. We see her seize upon the old wrongs of Ireland and carefully kindle them into a flame of resentment that tricks half of Ireland into becoming almost an ally of the Hun who would, if he gained the power he seeks, give Ireland a far worse oppression to resent. We learn that for years Germany has been compiling a blackmail book with the object of forcing prominent individual Englishmen to play Germany's game instead of England's. We have seen Italians and French on the battle-front beguiled into weakness at critical moments through skilful presentation of lies as truth. We have seen the systematic German propaganda that undermined Russia and, supplemented at last by force and more open lies and treachery, still undermines her, playing upon every human impulse from hunger to the noblest ideals. We have seen her chain the wily Turk to her chariot wheels with chains that were at first invisible, and we watch Austria-Hungary struggling against these same chains. We hear that there is in Berlin a "Bureau of Enemy Psychology" to systematize this "working" of other peoples.

ALL these things, and many more, we see. But we are slow to realize how many more things of the same kind Germany is still doing. Most of us still fail to see that there is a still unknown total of such activities that constitutes a machine powerful and deadly beyond our dreams. Germany's army and navy are formidable, but they are as nothing without the working of this machine of lies and juggling and hate and evil.

And yet we can wreck that machine. Only two things are needed to wreck it—watchfulness and publicity, the publicity of truth.

Wake up! Look back over forty years and see what the Hun machine accomplished in working patiently and secretly toward a distant end. Then ask yourself this: What is Germany's next end and how is she working for it? What is she planning for the *next* forty years and what methods is she using *right now* to gain those distant ends?

WE KNOW that she has already laid extensive plans for commercial dominance after the war. We know that she is already planning and preparing for the *next* war. We know that, in a general way, her ultimate aim is Prussian dominion over the whole world. But we have no exact knowledge of the concrete steps she purposes along the way, not even of the main steps. What *is* Germany planning for the next forty years? And what influences is she *now* bringing to bear upon *us* to attain her distant as well as her immediate ends?

We must learn. By eternal watchfulness. We must combat her ends and her methods. By truth and publicity.

IT IS not, of course, a matter of the distant future only. Let no man think that the present war is being decided on the western front alone, or on any other

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battle-front alone. The battle-front is merely the place where results are being registered. The real struggle is almost unseen, and for the weapons used we have only the loose and careless word "propaganda." The battle-front demands our utmost material attention. But we must find more time to fight the other fight. Germany finds time for it. So must we. Or lose both fights—in this war or the next, or both.

WE AMERICANS and Canadians of the Camp-Fire must do our share, and this department offers one means of doing it. We are of many kinds—adventurers, professional men, business men. We live or wander here, there and everywhere, by all kinds of paths and in all kinds of capacities. We hear and see all kinds of things from all kinds of angles. Every time one of us detects a Hun method, a Hun aim, in any field, let him state it briefly and send it in so that it may go, in print, to each of the rest of us, serve to put each of us on his guard against that Hun effort and, through publicity, kill the effects of that effort.

It is no part of this work to denounce individuals. If you suspect individuals, report them to the Secret Service. The purpose of this department is to brand the tools *any* pro-German individual must work with.

It will be several issues before there is time for reports to come in and reach you in print. But the time for you to send in a report is now. Be brief and to the point. We want sign-boards, not essays.—A. S. H.

LOOKING AHEAD

"Win the War but Get Ready for Peace"

No matter how long the war lasts it is our first duty during that time to work unrelentingly for victory. But we have a second duty. In peace we failed to prepare for war. In war we must not fail to prepare for peace.

To help in meeting this second duty while we are meeting the first, *Adventure* has instituted this department. Its main purpose is to direct our readers' attention more definitely to the many problems America will face when peace comes and to offer an open forum for exchange of views.

In order to hear from as many as possible each expression of opinion must be limited to not more than one hundred and fifty words at most. Merely state the problem that, to you, seems most urgent, adding briefly if you like, your idea of the right solution. The department's value lies in the opinions taken as a whole, not in any one of them.

"Looking Ahead" is not a place for editorial opinion. It is a forum for the opinions of as many as possible; its office is to seek the consensus of those opinions as a guide and stimulus to all. The editors will do their honest best to make the selection for publication as closely as possible indicative of the proportionate importance given the various problems and suggestions by the Americans of all classes and conditions who read our magazine.

It is up to you as an American to do your part. If you haven't thought about these things, think now. Then tell us what you think.

All contributions must be signed, with address given. Only initials will be printed if you insist, but the nation's problems are matters on which an American should not be afraid to speak over his own name.

(Since a magazine is made up ahead, it will be several issues before there can be time to put into and give you the replies from readers in response to these first appearances of this Department. Send yours in now.)

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VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later we may furnish a metal card or tag. If interested in metal cards, say so on a *post-card—not* in a letter. No obligation entailed. These post-cards, filed, will guide us as to demand and number needed.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: February, 1911 and June, 1913.—P. K. McDONALD, Wentworth Avenue, Papatoetoe, Auckland, New Zealand.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscript. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3000 welcomed.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two or three months between sending and publication.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for American, Canadian, and Other Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp, at the Front or in Hospital.

Any one in the United States or Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department as soon as censorship of soldiers' foreign addresses permits. In the meantime his address can be printed as "care *Adventure*," letters to be forwarded at once by us to the military address he gives us in confidence. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those fighting in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

SERGEANT HARRY KUTCHER, care of *Adventure.*
PRIVATE B. ENGLEBOY, care of *Adventure.*
PRIVATE ARVID F. PETERSON, care of *Adventure.*
CLARENCE F. BRYSON, care of *Adventure.*

Missing Friends or Relatives

Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located one out of about every five inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N. St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

American Defense Society, Inc., 44 East 23d St., New York City—An organization working systematically for real Americanism and furthering the winning of the war by watchfulness and effort at the right points.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 Thirty-third Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men, local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs, and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, Yankton, S. Dak. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri Valley.

9. Western U. S. Part 3 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 912 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

10. Mexico Part 2
J. W. WHITEAKER, Cedar Park, Texas. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries. (Mr. Whiteaker is now serving with our army in France. His department is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

11. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica Ave., Denver, Colo. Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. R'y. Canoes and snow-shoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

12. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

★(*Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps, NOT attached*)
Return postage not required from U. S. or Canadian soldiers, sailors, or marines in service outside the U. S., its possessions, or Canada.

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13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

14. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Arlington, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game; minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

16. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 397 Monadnock Bldg., San Francisco, Calif. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

17. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, Nitro, West Va. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

18. The Balkans
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH, *Evening Post*, 20 Vesey St., New York City. Covering Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Turkey (in Europe); travel, sport, customs, language, local conditions, markets, industries.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
ROBERT WELLES RITCHIE, Mountain Lakes, N. J. Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios.

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalin; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, 1604 Chapin Ave., Burlingame, Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba, Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Castle View, Meriden, Conn. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Authors' League of America, Aeolian Hall, New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba. Or J. V. Knight, Director, Republic of Cuba News Bureau, Woolworth Building, New York.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitsky.

Prospecting Taught by Mail?

Question:—"Is it possible for a young chap to learn prospecting from a good correspondence school? I also wish to know if all the gold section of Alaska is owned by private people. I would like to know if one can join a company of prospectors who are hired. Or if one must be an independent one. As I think some actual experience would help a great deal. Also could one do some trapping on the side? Are fur-bearing animals abundant and would trapping be profitable? What is the climate of Alaska? Are you aware of any gold strikes being made lately? Are there any other metals beside gold?

"I have gone camping a number of times and am sure I would like anything pertaining to outdoor life. If it is possible for you to help me in this way I will be very grateful to you."—RICHARD J. DOHERTY, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—I doubt if prospecting for placer gold, at least, can be taught in a school—particularly a correspondence school. Something could be learned of the rock formations of the regions in which placer gold is most likely to be found, but it would take a great deal of time and be of but little practical help for many reasons which are too technical to detail here. A book or two on those branches of geology and mining which bear on the subject are, however, mighty good aids to the intelligent prospector in the field; but experience is the 95 per cent. instructor.

The "gold section of Alaska" is not a distinct body of land, as your phrase implies. Gold in more or less important quantities is scattered over very many parts of Alaska.

A little gold may be found almost anywhere in the hills and mountains of the West. It is the most widely distributed, probably, of all the metals—at least the precious metals. The mining-camps where people mine profitably, however, are merely those favored regions—usually only ten or twenty miles in length—where the gravels have been so concentrated as to be profitably mined, or brought to the surface and washed.

In such camps there are often two or three per cent. of the claims staked which, in the final wind-up, show a substantial profit. The balance usually have more money put into them than is ever taken out. There are plenty of chances of profitable mining in Alaska—probably as many as ever, though

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there have been no new strikes of any great importance for some years. But small strikes and new claims are opened up in many places every year.

Placer mining, taking it by and large, offers about the same chance for the man of small means as any other out-of-door (or indoor) business, and no more. But there is a pleasing element of chance for big winnings which attract people. It is not a large chance, though.

There are rarely companies of prospectors, and such groups are seldom successful. They quarrel and break up. A pal or two that gravitate together after long and successful chance association in the North make a good combination for prospecting and mining purposes. Mere friends going from the States stay together not once in a hundred cases!

Yes, you could do trapping on the side. It is a good business for hardy and clever men. The climate of Alaska, especially the interior climate, is distinctly good. The Winter is merely long and rather cold, that is all. But you know cold weather is not bad climate—which means stormy and moist weather. Alaska is not that way.

No one grumbles at the climate except the chronic kickers, and no one is ever really sick.

There are many metals besides gold. Copper is getting to be a greater thing than gold. That is just one other metal. Going camping hardly tests your fitness for Alaskan life. Investigate yourself and Alaska very thoroughly before hitting the trail.

Rabbits in New Zealand

Question:—"I desire information on the New Zealand rabbit.

"(1) Their commercial value there as food.

"(2) The fur value of the native rabbit.

"(3) The average weights of male and female.

"(4) The standard color or colors if more than one variety.

"(5) The value of matured breeders.

"Have the New Zealanders domesticated the rabbit and if so, is the industry on a large scale? Do they breed pure-bred stock or only for meat production.

"We have in this country the New Zealand red rabbit, of which I am a large breeder, but I am in doubt as to their origin. They are orange-colored or reddish tan, belly cream color and very docile and excellent breeders. I raise four litters a year from each brood doe. The does weigh eight to ten pounds—bucks seven to nine pounds. The price is from one dollar to five dollars each for matured stock according to quality, but I have paid one hundred dollars for a fine show specimen. If you can tell me the names of some breeders or any one who can secure some native rabbits for me (wild or domesticated) please do so, or if possible, give them my card and ask them to write me at once, giving prices on three females and one male, matured stock.

"I am a member of the National Pet Stock Association of America also the National New Zealand Club of America and own the largest breeding farm in the Southwest. If they care to do so and can ship the four rabbits collect on delivery I shall be glad to have them shipped to me and will promptly pay for them on arrival, or if in doubt as to my responsibility, send prices and I will forward amount in advance. The only difference to me is two or three months' time-saving.

"Will you send me a sample copy of your local newspaper and advertising rates. I might run a small advertisement to see what results I could get. Possibly some of your New Zealand breeders would like to ship large quantities to this country if the price we would pay appealed to them, or again they might want to import some of our heavy-weight meat-producing stock, Belgian hares or toy rabbits.

"I do a large business but am always looking for new fields and new customers.

"I infer from your letter in *Adventure* that you have been in the States and possibly you have visited our Southwest. The United States is to-day one big military camp, preparing for the licking that we shall administer to the Kaiser as soon as our 2,000,000 men can be whipped into shape to step into the trenches besides the poilus and the tommies and believe me I want to be with them; but after eight years as a gunner's mate, U. S. N., I am barred by a weak heart, a wife and two babies.

However, we are all with you, heart, soul and pocket-book and the Sammies, the Anzacs and the Tommies will give Kaiser Bill —— before they get through."—ROBERT D. MCCULLOCH, Manager, Royal Rabbit Farm, P. O. Box 21, Houston Heights, Texas.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—I cannot undertake to answer your catechism on bunny in detail, because the export of the rabbit with New Zealanders is an industry of the dead, not the living. As for reciprocal trading, that is impossible.

You see, the rabbit is looked upon as a pest, and is hunted all over the land, by order of the law and the statutes. The keeping of the rabbit as a pet is forbidden—so that cuts out your opportunity of developing trade relations with us. If you want to trade, you can only do it for United States, as a frozen meat. We use the rabbit as food pretty liberally, housewives paying retail thirty-six cents per pair, the average weight being six pounds each carcass. But the biggest operation is in the exports of rabbits to England. For this purpose they are frozen, in the skin.

This has been going on for years. For instance, away back in 1900 we exported 6,301,997 frozen rabbits, weighing 167,971 cwt., and valued at £154,856 ($794,280); in 1915, $459,240 worth.

The rabbit skin comes next to the carcass in value as an article of export, the value of the skins exported in 1900 being £41,689 ($207,845); in 1915, $202,080. You will be able to gather some further information regarding colors, etc., from a broker's report which I enclose from Dunedin, our most southern city, the center of the rabbit industry, which is practically untouched in the North Island. If you would like to go further into the matter, you might write to Messrs. Wright, Stephenson & Co., Merchants, Dunedin, New Zealand.

There is no breeding of any kind of rabbit over here—it is under law a pest, and farmers are punished in the courts if it is proved that they are as I have said, not poisoning off or shooting the pest. In the North Island, the State provides poisoned grain free of cost to farmers to kill off the rabbit; and farmers generally curse the day the rabbit was introduced into the country. We need our pastures to feed our cattle and sheep and horses, not the diminutive and voracious bunny. Therefore, much of your questioning goes unanswered, including a request for advertising rates—though I hate to pass up a proposition to advertise in the *Star!*

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I commend your enterprise to extend business to New Zealand, and hope that at least one result of the war will be an enlargement of trade between us and United States. Unfortunately, I have not yet been in America—that is a pleasure to come, and may it be soon. Glad to hear your good report of Americans' whole-hearted interest in the war, and agree with you that the Sammies, the Tommies, and the Anzacs will give the Kaiser more than enough presently.—*Kia ora!*

How to Get a Ship

Question:—"I have my mind made up to going to sea and I am asking you through *Adventure* to guide me to questions that may try to keep me from doing so. I am a country fellow just in the city and also a greenhorn at sea but I am a willing learner. I am at present working in New York City but I do not like city life and am anxious for adventure on the sea. I have been doing hard work on a farm so it will be easy to me when it does come.

"I'd like to do work on the ship where I could build up a good-sized bunch of muscles, also the strength, too. I had a friend on board a fishing schooner and he was a big husky fellow. How are fishing schooners? In comparison with steamers (I mean for amount of work and pay).

"What's the pay of a seaman? Where could I write or go to so I can get on board a sea-going ship. I'd like to make it on a fishing schooner if possible. I am eighteen years old and one hundred and fifty-eight pounds in weight. How's that for a beginner? Is an able seaman a good working job? How's a coal-passer?

"If there's anything that I haven't mentioned and you know of will you please post me on them so I'd know a little about what I want to do.

"I'd like to get on a sail ship if that's possible. I don't think that there's anything going on with a steamship."— —— ——, New York City.

Answer, by Captain Dingle:—If you can find out that friend of yours who is or has been in fishermen, he can tell you about that end of the game. The deck-hands of a deep-sea fisherman work on shares, usually, and that plan works out well in money earned.

A seaman in ocean steamships now, during war time, earns from forty to sixty dollars a month, according to trade; firemen get the same, and coal-passers receive forty to fifty dollars, or less in small coastwise ships. Wages on sailing vessels are rather less, but not much, if the ship is going foreign.

As for anything "going on" in steamships, you'll get all the thrills you want passing through the submarine zone. But it is not easy right now to start going to sea.

You must first get a war-zone pass, which will permit you to go to docks and wharves where ships are. Then you must have a license to sail, procured from the Custom House. To get this last is usually easy for a seaman of experience with his papers; but not so easy for a greenhorn.

The best I can advise you is, write to, or visit, Captain Reisenberg, School Ship *Newport*, lying up-town in the Hudson River here. Ask if you can enroll there as a cadet. If not, it is because the ship is full; and you can learn there when vacancies may occur, or where other ships are lying. Another way is, apply to the Shipping Board, Recruiting Division, Custom House, Boston, stating your age, etc., and asking for particulars as to shipping.

To ship in the fishermen you must actually visit Boston, or Gloucester, or other Eastern port, get the necessary permit to go to the harbor (if there is such a rule there; it is by no means universal, and where I live, right on the sea, we have no such restriction and apply in person aboard the many schooners you will find at their wharfs and docks.

I could name some fishermen companies, but it would do you no good. You must go and apply. They want to see the man they're shipping. Regarding the desire for muscle-building, you'll get it a-plenty in any fisherman or sailing vessel, and it's not altogether unknown in steamships.

Altogether the very best you can do—I understand, of course, you are not liable to the draft—is to find out that friend of yours who went fishing, and try his way. It's a hard life, but has its pleasures, particularly in Summer, and the money comes very good indeed, generally.

Homesteads in Alaska

Question:—"I am writing you for information in regard to Alaska as an agricultural country. Can one take up homesteads there now and if so what part would you advise locating? Is there much timber on land and what kind? If you can give me this information or give name and address of some one who can, it will be appreciated very much by, H. V. Millstead," Casper, Wyoming.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—There are several Agricultural Experiment Stations in Alaska, and by writing to that office, Department of Agriculture, Washington, District of Columbia, you will receive, free of charge, the detailed reports issued yearly. Write also to the Department of the Interior and to the States Relations Bureau for their pamphlets on settlements in Alaska.

You will find that homesteads may be located under the same law as that now operative in the States and that there are great areas that are entirely adapted to agriculture, producing crops suited to the climate and latitude.

One however should weigh the question of settlement carefully. Practically all of the land requires clearing and the markets for products are few and small. It is in every sense a serious, pioneering proposition in a country of immense distances, primitive means of transport and long Winters. On the other hand it is a country of a great future and the only large "West" still left to the hardy and adventurous carvers-out of great futures for themselves. There are fine chances for cattle-raising, too, which may be considered.

As to a preferable region—I should say the Susitna Valley, where the railroad is now building ought to be the best—knowing, however, nothing of your ideas and plans and purposes. You will learn all you need to know preliminarily from the literature I have suggested. After that write me for any knotty-problem solutions you may be in need of.

Mr. Beadle's Suggestion

MR. BEADLE, one of the editors of "Ask Adventure," says that he finds it easier to reply to letters containing questions which are numbered and made as specific as possible. Seems reasonable.—The A. A. Editor.

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HOW TO HELP WIN THE WAR

A Department Telling What *You* Can Do And How to Find Out About It

To make such a department comprehensive, reliable and up-to-date entails much work and considerable machinery. Since this machinery has already been created and put into operation, *Adventure* can render service most efficiently by giving its readers the use of this practical agency for connecting individual willingness with national needs.

***Adventure's* big brother, *Everybody's Magazine*, now conducts a "War Service Guide."**

There are thousands of good Americans who, with all their hearts, want to help in the big job at hand, but do not know what to do or how to find it and it is these patriots which *Everybody's* "Guide" wants to help enlist where they can be of real service. If you are one of them, write to Mr. Hoyt, care of *Everybody's* "Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City. Tell him your circumstances and your qualifications—whether you are looking for volunteer or paid work, whether you can give all or part time, in your home only, or anyhere the job may call you. Give him all the data he may need to judge what work you might do. There are "bits" to be done in farm and industrial work, in various relief organizations and in the Government offices as well as in the Army or Navy.

***Everybody's* "Guide" will also be glad to tackle any question of allowance or allotment, Government insurance or legal status growing out of the new and closer relationship which many are forming with Uncle Sam. Let *Everybody's* "Guide" try to help you.**

Do YOUR Part

Find out what to do and how to do it by writing to—MR. HOYT,
***Everybody's* "War Service Guide," Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York.**

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

SIBLEY, JOHN RODNEY. Last heard of July 30, 1917, in Warren, Rhode Island. Believed to have taken another name. 5 ft. 11 in. tall, 165-170 lbs., very dark brown hair, turning gray; gray eyes with dark ring at edge of iris—rather round face, clean shaven but naturally very heavy beard. Has only index and middle finger on right hand. Spoke of enlisting in Canada as cook. Worked for N. P. Railway from August 23, 1904, to March 15, 1905, as cook on dining-cars, then in lunch room at Spokane, Wash. Would be glad to hear from any one who knew him at that time. Sisters all right—wife wants address.—Address MAY P. SIBLEY, 6 Martin Court, Pawtucket, R. I.

LOVEDAY, F. (Husband). Last heard from in Canada. Wife and baby want you to come home as soon as possible. Wife is sick.—Address MRS. VIOLET LOVEDAY, 94 Smith St., Portland, Me.

RIGNEY, ANNA. Lived in Ray Ridge section of Brooklyn, New York, in 1911, the last time I heard of her. She is now about 22 years old, weighs between 125 and 135 lbs. She is about 5 ft. 5 in. tall, and fair complexioned. Any information regarding her whereabouts will be appreciated by her brother.—Address WILLIAM J. RIGNEY, General Delivery, Buffalo, N. Y.

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CUNNINGHAM, JAMES, MAGGIE, MARY and JOHN (Brothers and sisters). Supposed to have gone to Seattle or Spokane, Washington, to take up farming ten or fifteen years ago. Mary and John formerly lived with Mrs. Sara C. Taylor, Novi, Okland Co., Michigan. Any information concerning them would be appreciated.—Address MRS. FANNIE CUNNINGHAM, 601 Scribner Ave., N. W., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

DUPREE, ALEX., ("PACKER.") Age 45 years., 5 ft. 9 in. Very dark complexion. Last heard from in Pretoria, Transvaal in 1901, was going to the Congo.—Address JAMES GORDE, Tampa, Fla.

HALLORAN, "TOM." Last heard of in India. Will you write your old comrade in arms?—Address E. J. CUSSEN, Canadian, Texas.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be reprinted alphabetically.

GENDE, EUGENIO (CUZZUCREA, EUGENIO). 27 years old. Has lived in West Virginia about 12 years. Worked as a boss in West Virginia coal mines and is believed to be employed as a court interpreter.—Address FORTUNATO CUZZUCREA, Italian Royal Navy *Bronte* (Italian Consul), Baltimore, Md.

GAINTY, JOHN (Husband). Formerly of Glassboro, N. J. Last heard from in New York City, Feb. 22, 1909. He then stated he was going to the far West but no place definite.—Address MRS. EMMA E. GAINTY, 5105 Reno St., Philadelphia, Pa.

THE following have been inquired for in full, in either the First September, Mid-September or First October issues of *Adventure*. They can get name of inquirer from this magazine:

ADAMS, (two aunts and uncle); Chantles, Memer de; Doolittle, J. C.; Golden, Jimmie; Hammack, (Count) B. H.; Harper, Lafayette; Harris, Geo.; Haley, Robt. E. Lee; Johnson, (Standfast) J. C.; Key, Thos. W.; King, Frank M.; McAlvey, Maggie and William and John; Montgomery, Samuel; Starks, Percy Raymond; Stewart, Ben; Timpton, Clyde; "Texas"; Van. Tassel, "Red"; Westfall, Clarence V.

MISCELLANEOUS—Woodford, William; Householder, Bud; Gerbrick, Commillus. Bunch who were on the "Drag Line" between Button Willow and Lost Hills, Calif., in 1913-14-15. Relatives of Franklin J. Fellows.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH; Ruth Gilfillan; Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer.

NUMBERS L. T. 284, C. 293, W. 311, W. 312, L. T. 343. Please send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you—Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

FIRST NOVEMBER ADVENTURE

In the First November number, which comes to you on October 3d, you will find the following nine stories besides the two mentioned in the ad on page 2:

THE DIVINING-ROD AT GRIZZLY — *By Robert J. Pearsall*
The story of a station agent in a little Western town—and a gentleman of inventive genius.

THE WILDERNESS TRAP — *By Hugh Pendexter*
Another thrilling tale of the Indian-fighting days when New York was a colony.

HELLUVANOTE — *By Roy P. Churchill*
Sailors, religion and mortgages all mixed up together—to the dismay of the Jackies.

THE HABERDASHER — *By James Francis Dwyer*
What happens when a fast man locates in a slow town.

FLOTSAM — *By S. B. H. Hurst*
A tale of Alaska—and two of the world's wastrels thrown up upon its barren shores.

THE FINN'S CURSE — *By Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*
Back to the days of old Scotland when the Norsemen under *Harald* swept the pirates from the seas, this story takes you.

TIGER BILL — *By William Carlton Davis*
In a mushroom Western camp you find him—this fellow who fights with lightning guns and the claws of a cat.

THE HAND OF PROVIDENCE — *By W. C. Tuttle*
Remember your first auto? See what a reception the first of the species received in Piperock.

THE BELLS OF SAN JUAN. Conclusion — *By Jackson Gregory*
In the last part of this stirring tale of the Southwest *Galloway* springs his coup—and *Ignacio* rings his bells.

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505 TIFFANY BELCHER RING SET WITH ONE FINE QUALITY DIAMOND $40.00

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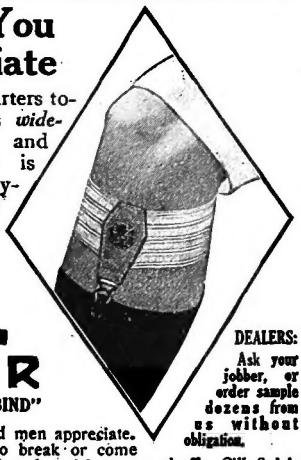

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Short Story Writers Wanted!

There is a tremendous demand for short stories, photo plays, magazine and newspaper articles. 24,868 publications buy short stories. $3,000.00 a year is a small income for a writer. You can be successful. Jack London said so. He and other great writers have endorsed our course. Learn at home during your spare time. Write Today for FREE BOOK. Our free book, "How to Write," tells you about it; also gives details of the special introductory offer that is being made for a limited time. Don't lose this opportunity. Write today.

Hoosier Institute Short Story Dept., Dept. 1076. **Fort Wayne, Ind.**

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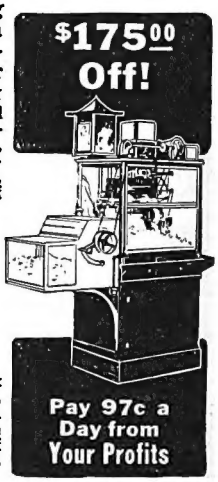

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